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Veritas



Special Edition: Special Forces in Bolivia

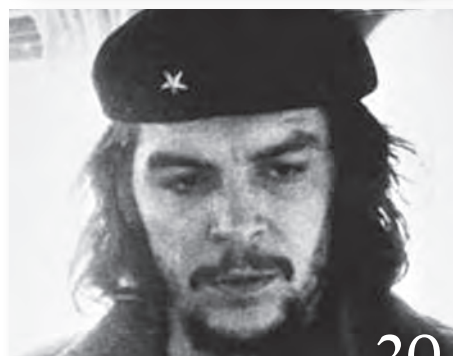


Veritas

Special Edition: Special Forces in Bolivia

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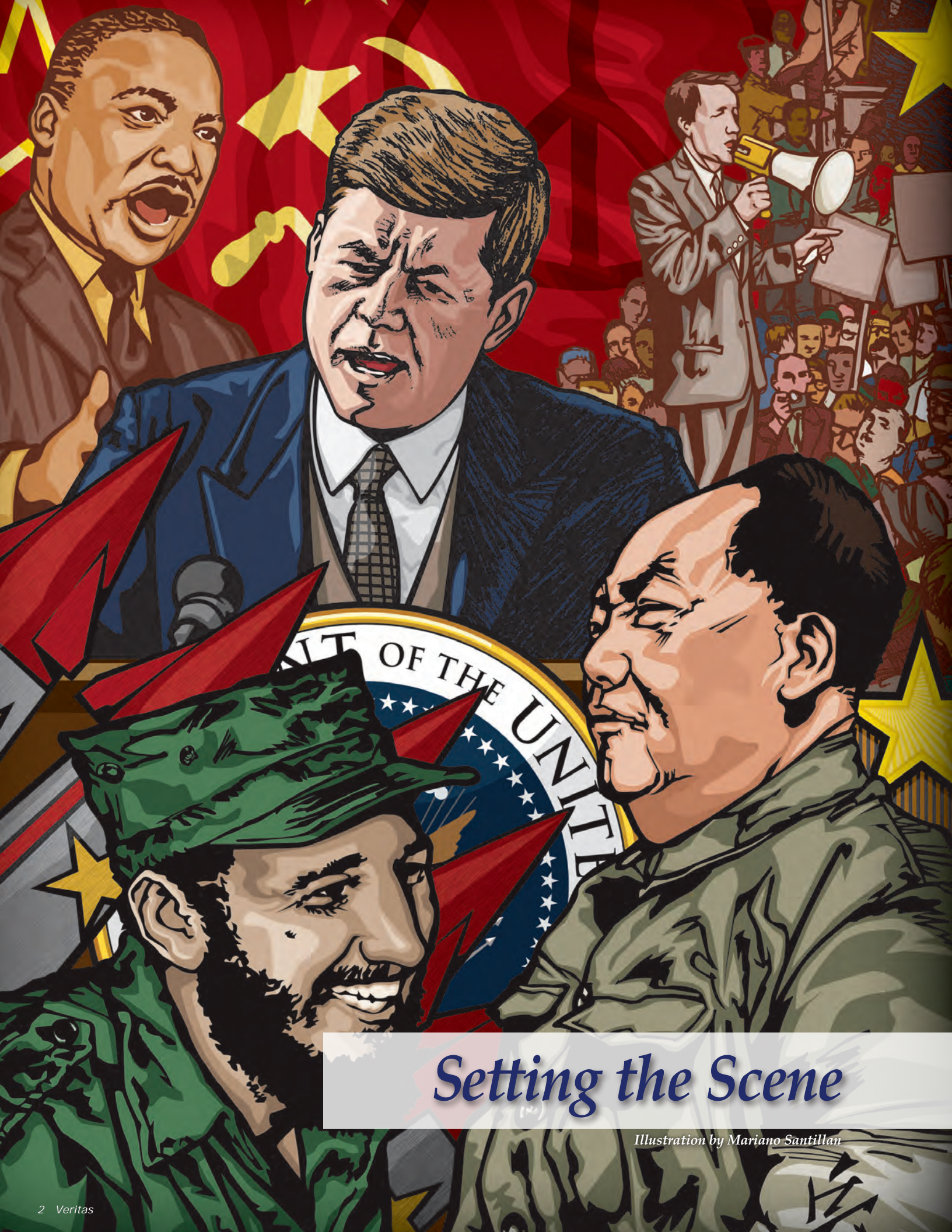
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Setting the Scene

Illustration by Mariano Santillan



Introduction

by Charles H. Briscoe

On Monday morning, 3 April 1967, Colonel (COL) Magnus L. Smith, the 8th Special Forces Group (SFG) commander in the Panama Canal Zone, was directed by U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) to prepare a mobile training team (MTT) for a “classified” mission. *[At this time all SF MTT missions were classified until completed unless labeled very sensitive. In that case the National Security Act twenty-year classification review rule applied].* The 1967 Bolivia MTT-BL 404-67X training mission fit the “classified very sensitive” category.¹

The mission was significant. A Ranger-qualified SF captain/major was to lead the element. Despite having only two SF companies assigned (the standard was three for an SF group), the 8th SFG at Fort Gulick on the Atlantic side of the isthmus, was the Special Action Force (SAF) for Latin America. At the time, there were only two Ranger-qualified captains or majors available; one was on Vietnam orders (Captain (CPT) Duane Boyer, B Company) and the other was the Group S-3 (Operations Officer), Major (MAJ) Ralph W. Shelton, who assigned MTT missions.²

“I wasn’t specially-selected; it was simply ‘luck of the draw’ that I was the only one available that met the criteria. We tried to get CPT Boyer delayed, but Department of the Army (DA) wasn’t about to do that. So, I was the guy,” said MAJ Shelton. “COL Smith told me that we were to train a Ranger Battalion for the Bolivians because the country was being threatened by Communist insurgency. An [Bolivian] Army unit had already been chewed up by a bunch of guerrillas. We didn’t know that Che Guevara was there. I was sent over to SOUTHCOM at Quarry Heights (across the isthmus) for details. I was given license to pick my sixteen-man team, but we were to deploy as quickly as possible.”³ That was the Bolivia mission for 1967. Personal thumbnail biographies up to 1967 and photos will be used to identify personnel interviewed. The bios reflect the experience that these SF soldiers “brought to the table” for the Bolivia mission.

This issue of *Veritas* will explain the 8th SFG missions to Bolivia in 1967: to organize and train a Ranger Battalion; to train nine infantry rifle companies in small unit tactics

and counterinsurgency (COIN) operations and afterwords; to advise the Airborne Battalion and to teach COIN operations to junior officers at the Combat Arms School in Cochabamba.⁶ The capture of Ernesto “Che” Guevara and the annihilation of the Cuban-led guerrilla insurgency by the SF-trained Bolivian Rangers demonstrated the value of COIN training and validated the precepts of foreign internal defense (FID). However, the significance of this training mission was overshadowed by an escalating social turmoil that threatened America (the Detroit riots and civil rights demonstrations in Washington) and the huge Communist offensive throughout South Vietnam beginning in November 1967 and extending through January 1968 (popularly known as the Tet Offensive of 1968).

Considering this SF mission in the context of the greatest period of social upheaval in American history, the 1960s, the reader can better appreciate how important, complex, and sensitive this assignment was. Instead of complicating the history with the myriad of works that have been published afterwards, many of which are sensational, hypothetical or polemic, like the diaries of Che Guevara, official Cuban Communist Party accounts, and intelligence officer memoirs, the old Mission Area Analysis (MAA) format will rely almost entirely on what was available to the 8th SFG soldiers preparing for the mission in 1967. It is not our intent to analyze why the mission succeeded, why the Bolivians were able to eliminate the insurgency, nor why Che and his Cuban-led effort to start a continental revolution in South America failed. MTT-BL 404-67X will be explained as Major “Pappy” Shelton and his fifteen-man team understood the mission then.

To amplify this Mission Area Analysis approach the five paragraph military field order format will be followed: **Situation** [Friendly Order of Battle (military elements by type & size) with attachments], Enemy Order of Battle (insurgents & local Communist Party), weather, and terrain); **Mission**; **Execution** [Concept of Operation from highest to lowest levels (how the mission will be accomplished)]; **Administration & Logistics**; **Command & Control** (Chain of Command and Communications).

The **Situation** will address the significant events of the 1960s in the U.S., the world, Latin America, and Bolivia

COL Louis L. Felder replaced COL Magnus L. Smith as the 8th SFG Commander.



MAJ Ralph W. “Pappy” Shelton

DOB: 8 November 1929
POB: Corinth, MS
HS: GED
DLI: Spanish

Army: Joined in 1947; trained as a tank crewman; Japan, 1948-1950, 1st Cav Division; Korea, 1950-1951, Inf Sqd Ldr & Plt Sgt, G Co, 19th Inf Regt, 24th Inf Division, Silver Star, WIA twice; 1952-1955, Fort Gordon, GA, 1955, Guard Cdr, Disciplinary Barracks; Germany, 1957, Inf Plt Sgt, 8th Inf Division; SFC to OCS 1957; Fort Jackson, SC, 1958-1960 BCT Co XO & Cdr; Korea, 1960-1961, Inf Plt Ldr & Co Cdr, 1/4th Cav, 1st Cav Division; Fort Bragg, NC, 1961 joined SF; White Star in Laos, 1962; 1963 Inf Off Advanced Course & DLI Spanish; Panama, 1964-1967, 8th SFG, Panama riots (1964); Dominican Republic (1965); late 1966 8th SFG S-3.⁴

before and during the 1967 mission. They provide the reader with the necessary context. Interviews of nine surviving MTT veterans will provide realism and make the contents of the other four paragraphs more interesting and personal. The elements of the five paragraphs will be presented in normal order.

This introduction will be followed by an article on the mission preparation done by the SF team in Panama and the reconnaissance conducted by the advance echelon (ADVON) in Bolivia. A tourist sketch of the country in 1967 will cover geography, weather, the key historical events, demographics, the political situation, and the economics. That will be followed by an historical summary of major world events of the turbulent 1960s, concluding in 1967.

Still, the mid-1960s were the height of the Cold War. An American-led Western world faced a divided Soviet and Chinese Eastern Bloc. Communist-supported “wars of national liberation” had erupted worldwide making COIN training the primary task of Special Forces’ FID mission. This article will show how prevalent insurgencies were by 1967, where they were, how the “domino effect” philosophy determined U.S. foreign policy (anti-Communist) in developing countries, and how Washington was dealing with these Cold War threats. Combined together these factors determined how President René Barrientos Ortuño’s request for immediate military assistance would be answered in the late spring of 1967.⁷

After his popular election in 1966, President Barrientos had requested additional military training for the Bolivian Army during an official visit to Washington. In the early 1960s, an SF MTT organized and trained an airborne

MTT-BL 404-67X Roster

MAJ Ralph W. Shelton – Commander

- (1) CPT Edmond L. Fricke – Executive Officer/S-3
- (1) CPT LeRoy Mitchell – Executive Officer/S-3
- (2) CPT James Trimble – S-1/S-4
- (3) CPT Margarito Cruz – S-2
- (3) 1LT Harvey W. Wallender – S-2
MSG (SGM) Oliverio Gomez – Team Sergeant
MSG Roland J. Milliard – Intelligence Sergeant
SFC Ethyl W. Duffield – Demolitions Sergeant
- (4) SFC Daniel V. Chapa – Light Weapons Sergeant
- (5) SFC Richard A. Kimmich – Light Weapons Sergeant
- (5) SFC Johnnie E. Reynolds – Admin Supervisor/S-4
- (4) SFC Hector Rivera-Colon – Heavy Weapons Sergeant
- (2) SFC Harold T. Carpenter – Heavy Weapons Sergeant
- (6) SFC Roger L. Kluckman – Communications Supervisor
- (6) SFC William R. Bush – Communications Supervisor
- (7) SSG Jerald L. Peterson – Medical Specialist
- (7) SFC Robert L. Owens – Medical Supervisor
SSG James A. Hapka – Medical Specialist
SSG William W. Burkett – Radio Operator
SSG Wendell P. Thompson Jr. – Radio Operator
SGT Alvin E. Graham III – Radio Operator
SGT Byron R. Sigg – Radio Operator

Legend

- (1) CPT Mitchell replaced CPT Fricke 3 Oct 67
- (2) SFC Carpenter replaced CPT Trimble 30 Aug 67
- (3) 1LT Wallender replaced CPT Cruz 3 Oct 67
- (4) SFC Chapa replaced SFC Rivera-Colon 24 May 67
- (5) SFC Reynolds replaced SFC Kimmich 3 Oct 67
- (6) SFC Bush replaced SFC Kluckman 19 Jun 67
- (7) SFC Owens replaced SSG Peterson 3 Oct 67⁵

***Note: This is the official roster for MTT-BL 404-67X. The sixteen-man MTT used two C-130 Hercules to carry them and their supplies and equipment for 179 days TDY (temporary duty) to Bolivia in 1967. Missions beyond 180 days required a PCS (permanent change of station).*

battalion at Cochabamba. It was to be the first of several elite units oriented for mountain, river, and jungle warfare. Bolivian officers had been attending COIN courses at the School of the Americas in Panama as well. Since Bolivia was not facing an immediate insurgent threat in late 1966, the COIN training for infantry units was programmed for 1968. That scheduled training was pushed forward when Army patrols in southeast Bolivia were ambushed by foreign-led insurgents in early March 1967.

President Barrientos wanted a Ranger battalion organized and trained to combat the insurgent threat as soon as possible. The mission was created, and the United States Military Group (MILGP) in La Paz coordinated an ADVON visit for 8th SFG personnel while the main body in Panama began its preparations. Following these activities will be sections associated with Mission Prep; Enemy Order of Battle (the Bolivian Communist party, Cuba's role in the hemisphere, the exploits of Che Guevara); Friendly Order of Battle (the Bolivian armed forces, other ongoing U.S.



Bolivian President René Barrientos Ortuño. Note that he is wearing the Bolivian Ranger badge atop the decorations on his left breast pocket.

military training in Bolivia, Peace Corps volunteers, and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

Then, the articles will be chronological: establishment of the training base at La Esperanza; organization, training, and graduation of the Ranger Battalion; prep for the follow-on training mission; the capture of Che Guevara by the Rangers; the training of nine infantry companies in COIN operations; civic action activities of the SF team; and SF in Cochabamba. The conclusion will be based on MAJ Shelton's AAR and SOUTHCOM briefing. An epilogue covers the aftermath of SF's first successful COIN mission and Cuba's "martyrdom" of Che Guevara that raised him to mythological status. The succeeding article explains the 8th SFG mission preparation in Panama while the ADVON was in Bolivia getting briefed by the MILGP in La Paz before searching for the best training site in the operational area. ▲

Charles H. Briscoe has been the USASOC Command Historian since 2000. A graduate of The Citadel, this retired Army special operations officer earned his PhD from the University of South Carolina. Current research interests include Army special operations during the Korean War, in El Salvador, and the Lodge Act.

Endnotes

- 1 Ralph W. Shelton interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, Sweetwater, TN, 4 April 2007, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited as Shelton interview with date.
- 2 Shelton interviews, 4 April 2007 and 13 April 2007.
- 3 Shelton interview, 4 April 2007.
- 4 Shelton interview, 12 April 2007.
- 5 MTT BL 404-67X, 8th Special Forces Group (Airborne), 1st Special Forces, Special Action Force, Fort Gulick, Canal Zone. SUBJECT: Report of Mobile Training Team to Bolivia (RCS CSGPO-125), 10 December 1967, hereafter cited as MTT BL 404-67X Report, 10 December 1967.
- 6 John D. Waghelstein, telephone interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 12 June 2007, Bristol, RI, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 7 Henry Butterfield Ryan. *The Fall of Che Guevara: A Story of Soldiers, Spies, and Diplomats* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1998), 91.



*“Beggar on a
Throne of Gold:
A Short History of Bolivia”*

by Robert W. Jones, Jr.

Bolivia is a land of sharp physical and social contrasts. Although blessed with enormous mineral wealth Bolivia was (and is) one of the poorest nations of Latin America and has been described as a “Beggar on a Throne of Gold.”¹ This article presents a short description of Bolivia as it appeared in 1967 when Che Guevara prepared to export revolution to the center of South America. In Guevara’s estimation, Bolivia was ripe for revolution with its history of instability and a disenfranchised Indian population. This article covers the geography, history, and politics of Bolivia.

Geography and Demographics

Bolivia’s terrain and people are extremely diverse. Since geography is a primary factor in the distribution of the population, these two aspects of Bolivia will be discussed together. In the 1960s Bolivian society was predominantly rural and Indian unlike the rest of South America. The Indians, primarily Quechua or Aymara, made up between fifty to seventy percent of the population. The three major Indian dialects are Quechua, Aymara, and Guaraní. The remainder of the population were whites and mixed races (called “*mestizos*”). It is difficult to get an accurate census because the Indians have always been transitory and there are cultural sensitivities. Race determines social status in Bolivian society. A *mestizo* may claim to be white to gain social status, just as an economically successful Indian may claim to be a *mestizo* or “*cholo*” (in Bolivian slang).² Geography and demographics are intertwined.

Geographers and geologists generally divide Bolivia into three geographic regions. The first region is the Andes Mountains and *Altiplano*, in the west and south. The Andes are actually two north-south parallel ranges (*cordilleras*). The western range (*Cordillera Occidental*) runs along the Peru and Chile borders. The eastern range (*Cordillera Oriental*) stretches from Peru to Argentina and Chile. In between the two ranges is the *Altiplano*, a highland desert plateau that is 500 miles long by 80 miles wide. The *Altiplano* is 12,000 to 13,000 feet above sea level.³ It gets very little rainfall because the two high *cordilleras* block rain clouds. Because of this, the scrub



The varied geographic regions of Bolivia make it one of the most climatically diverse countries in South America. Map by D. Telles.

vegetation grows sparser towards the south, where the terrain is rocky with dry red clay. Northwest of La Paz on the Peru border is Lake Titicaca, the highest commercially navigable lake in the world. The major cities on the *Altiplano* are the capital, La Paz, and Potosí, both 13,000 feet above sea level. About three-fourths of Bolivia’s population lives on the *Altiplano*.⁴ The Quechua and Aymara have lived there for centuries.⁵ The *Altiplano* Indians speak either Quechua or Aymara and have little knowledge of Spanish (especially written).

The semitropical and temperate valleys of the northeastern mountain range (called the *Cordillera Real*) form the second Bolivian geographic region. These long narrow valleys called “*Yungas*” (the Aymara word for “warm valleys”) are cut by rivers, which drain to the east. Climate and rainfall make the *Yungas* some of the

The Bolivian Altiplano (Spanish for “high plain”) landscape. Little rainfall and cold temperatures create a harsh environment.





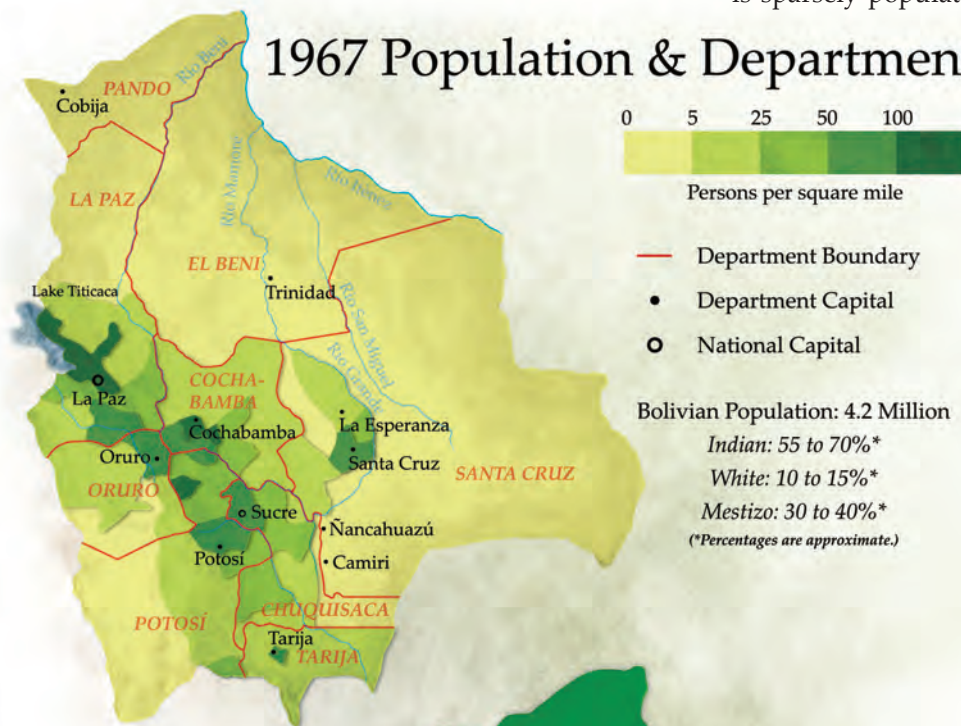
Indians make up between 55% to 70% of the Bolivian population. Since ethnicity determines class it is difficult to take an exact census. The Aymara Indian couple above are dressed in typical fashion for life on the harsh Altiplano.

most fertile land in Bolivia, and they are filled with lush vegetation. The barely accessible high mountain slopes and peaks are largely uncultivated because road access is limited. Sucre and Cochabamba are located in this region.⁶ The rural population is predominately Indian. The whites and *mestizos* dominate the cities.

The third region, the *Oriente*, is composed of the eastern tropical lowland plains (called *llanos*) that cover about two-thirds of the country.⁷ The *Oriente* is further subdivided into three areas based on topography and climate. The northern *Oriente*, primarily the Beni and Pando Departments and the northern part of Cochabamba Department, is tropical rain forest. During the rainy season, from October to May, transportation is difficult because large parts turn into swamp. By the 1960s, travel was increasingly done with aircraft or boats because of this. The entire Beni region (Amazon basin) is sparsely populated by approximately thirty different Indian groups.⁸

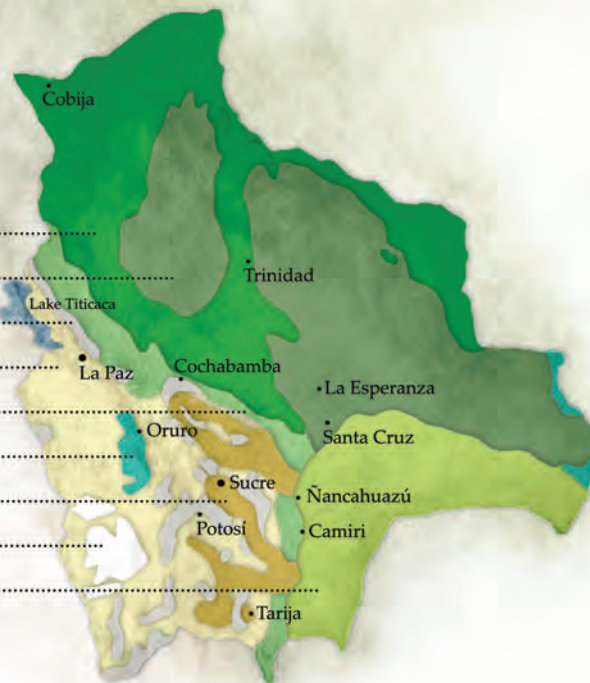
Moving south is the transitional zone with a drier climate, which comprises the northern half of the Santa Cruz Department. Here belts of tropical rainforests alternate with savanna grass plains. Large sections of land were cleared for farming and cattle ranching. In the late 1920s oil and natural gas exploration took place in this region. The largest city is Santa Cruz (*Santa Cruz de la Sierra*), which in the 1960s had considerable economic growth.⁹ While *mestizos* migrated to the area looking for opportunity, two very insular communities are east of Santa Cruz. In the 1950s several thousand Japanese and Okinawans emigrated to farm fruit, rice, and vegetables. There are also several large Mennonite communities east of Santa Cruz.¹⁰

1967 Population & Departments



Vegetation

- Tropical Rain Forest
- Grassland, Savannah, Woodland
- High Barren/Snow Covered Mtns.....
- High Altitude Bunch Grass.....
- Mountain Forest
- Marsh.....
- Dry Forest & Thornbrush.....
- Salt Flats.....
- Open Scrub Woodland.....



Three-quarters of the population lives on the Altiplano. The Nancahuazú area of the Chaco had a population density of less than 10 people per square mile. Map by D. Telles.

The final region is the southeastern most part of the *Oriente* lowlands called “the Chaco” (sometimes called the Gran Chaco or the Chaco Desert). The Chaco is basically a huge flat expanse, which has a striking climate contrast. It becomes increasingly drier moving from east to west. After a dry season of nine months (April to December), the desert transforms into a vast insect-infested swamp during a three-month long rainy season. These extremes in climate and rainfall support thorny brush jungle and grassy areas for cattle.¹¹ Cheap land brought few settlers to this inhospitable region.¹² However, it did attract Che Guevara in 1967.

Bolivia 1966-67:

- **Size:** 424,164 square miles
(about the size of Texas and California combined)
- **Gross National Product:** \$543 million
- **Annual per capita income:** \$125-\$145
- **Exchange rate:** 20 Bolivian Pesos (*Bolivianos*)
to \$1 (but depending on the area it could vary as much
as 50 B to \$1)
- **Literacy level:** Between 30% and 40%
(depending on the statistic source)
- **Life expectancy:** Between 43 to 48 years old
(lowest in South America)
- **US Foreign Aid** – \$68.9 million dollars
- **US Military Aid** – \$2.83 million dollars
(Bolivia was in the bottom third of Latin America for funding)

It was the hostile area bordering the Chaco that Che selected for his guerrilla *foco* base. The countryside has rolling hills with deep, densely wooded, thorn infested ravines (canyons or gullies) that generally run north - south. In the center of the area, the Ñancahuazú River twists its way through a steep canyon where smaller streams and gullies branch off the main river. Narrow riverbanks sporadically disappear into the canyon walls. The canyon sides are covered with thickets of reeds, trees, vines, and cacti. Hilltops are largely barren with small trees and scrub vegetation. Paths are limited, and cutting a trail with a machete is often necessary.¹³

The area around the Ñancahuazú River is sparsely populated with small towns and villages. There are few roads. The population is a mix of people, primarily lowland Guaraní Indians and poor *mestizos* who migrated for cheap land. This area had been part of a government land reform program giving ten-hectare homesteads (about 25 acres) to about 16,000 families.¹⁴ People cluster in small, isolated communities to eke out a living by farming, cattle ranching, or working on government oil and public works projects. The major transportation artery is the Santa Cruz - Cochabamba highway that connects the area to the *Altiplano*.



Francisco Pizarro was the Spanish Conquistador who conquered the Inca Empire, including what is present day Bolivia. He was killed in 1541 during a revolt by followers of Diego de Almagro, his principal rival, in Lima, Peru.

History

The history of Bolivia in the 1960s reflects its pre-Columbian and Spanish colonial heritage. The Indian groups eventually formed two “great” kingdoms, the Aymara and the Inca (Quechua).¹⁵ The Spanish conquest led by Francisco Pizarro began in 1526. During 300 years of colonial rule, Spain imposed its political and social institutions on a predominantly extractive economy that concentrated on mineral exports – first silver, and then tin – using Indian forced labor. After a hard struggle to gain independence in 1825, Bolivia’s history was marked with political and territorial insecurity. The one constant during the 18th and 19th centuries in Bolivia was instability.

Pre-Columbian History

The Inca Empire began expanding from the highlands of Peru in the early 13th century. In 1438, the Incas incorporated a large portion of western South America that included the Bolivian *Altiplano*. The empire was created and expanded by peaceful integration and military conquest. At its height the Incas controlled about 12 million people. The Inca Empire included large parts of today’s Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Argentina, Chile, and Colombia.

The Conquest

Francisco Pizarro, with fewer than 200 men, toppled the Inca Empire. Pizarro took advantage of the instability caused by a recent civil war, a smallpox epidemic, and European military technology to seize power. The death of Huayna Capac caused fighting between two half brothers, Huáscar and Atahualpa, over the succession to the Inca throne.¹⁶ After a three-year-long civil war (1529-1532) Atahualpa defeated Huáscar, just as the Spaniards arrived.¹⁷ On 16 November 1532, Pizarro captured Atahualpa and demanded a ransom for his life. After a large room was filled with gold and silver, the Inca ruler was executed.¹⁸ The conquistadors spent ten years consolidating power in the Andean region. Although there were several Indian rebellions, they were quickly put down. For 300 years Spain controlled what is present day Bolivia.

Colonialism – Upper Peru

The new colony called “Upper Peru,” (Bolivia) had been a neglected part of the Inca Empire. This continued under Spanish colonial rule until 1545 when large silver deposits were found at Potosí nearly 13,800 feet above sea level.¹⁹ That discovery transformed the backwater into the wealthiest part of the Spanish empire. Although the Spanish crown received 20% of the silver extracted, it fueled the entire region’s economy. The remote location of Potosí meant that everything – food, tools, animals, and labor – to support mining had to be imported.²⁰ In 1548 the town of La Paz was established on the trade route between the silver mines and the colonial capital at Lima, Peru. By 1650 Potosí was the largest city in South



A 16th Century woodcut of Cerro Potosí shows the Cerro Rico (Rich Hill). This mountain of silver funded the Spanish Empire. Once the silver ran out, tin became the major export of the country.

Mita System

The *mita*, a labor draft system set up by the Aymara kingdoms, was then adapted by the Incas. All males, except the young and old, served in the army, on public works projects—irrigation systems and imperial roads, or in the mines.²² *Mita* labor service took place between harvest and planting. With the Spanish conquest the *mita* tradition went away.

Francisco de Toledo, the Spanish governor of the viceroyalty of Peru, reinstated the *mita* in 1573. By adapting the *mita* to the European feudal system the Spanish required all indigenous (Indian) males between 18 to 60 years of age to work for three weeks per year and a year every six years in the mines or on other public works (repairing or building roads).²³ The “Potosí (Bolivia) *mita*,” required the indigenous population to work in the mines. The Indian death rate in the mines was reported to be 80% a year.²⁴ Later the *mita* was expanded to include a mandatory two-years of military service.

America (120,000 to 160,000 people when London had about 400,000).²¹ Silver extracted from Potosí became the principal source of Spanish royal wealth for three hundred years.

Simón Bolívar, “El Libertador,” led the rebel forces in the South American wars of independence to free Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Panama, and Bolivia. He was the first President of Bolivia.



Independence

The Spanish empire began to weaken when the French occupied Spain during the Napoleonic Wars. As Spanish royal authority weakened, two independence movements sprang up in South America. In the north, forces under Simón Bolívar fought the royalist armies in Venezuela, Colombia, and Ecuador. From Argentina, José de San Martín and Bernardo O’Higgins led forces across the Andes to free Chile, and then fought north to free Peru. Independence in Upper Peru was proclaimed in 1809, but it took 16 years of struggle to establish the republic named for Simón Bolívar, the Great Liberator. Bolivia was established on 6 August 1825; however, independence did not bring stability.

Bolivia’s future was marred by political turmoil and military defeats. In 1867, Bolivia lost territory in the north to Brazil. During the War of the Pacific (1879–1883), Bolivia allied with Peru against Chile. The clash was prompted by economics, over an unlikely source of revenue, guano (the nitrate-rich excrement of seabirds, bats, and seals).²⁵ Chile prevailed on land and sea and occupied the Peruvian capital, Lima.²⁶ Bolivia lost areas rich in natural resources, as well as its national pride. Most significantly, Bolivia lost access to the Pacific Ocean, making it a landlocked country.²⁷

Interim

From 1884 until the 1930s Bolivia enjoyed relative stability. The economy took a jump as tin replaced silver as the major export. World demand fostered the expansion of railways to transport the tin to the United States and Europe.²⁸ Bolivian intellectuals blamed Chile for its defeat in the War of the Pacific. Using reverse psychology, they promoted the need to create a national identity to overcome centuries of backwardness. Rival political parties worked for political and economic modernization. The politicians in government, elected by a small, literate, and Spanish-speaking electorate reorganized, reequipped, and professionalized the disgraced armed forces. They provided stability and prosperity into the next century.



A legacy of loss. Since 1867 Bolivia has lost territory to Brazil, Chile, and Paraguay, almost equal to the present day country. Map by D. Telles.

This photo shows a Bolivian patrol during the Chaco War. Note the inhospitable terrain of cactus and thorn bushes during the dry season. During rainy season the area becomes a swamp.



The 20th century was marked with three great events: the Chaco War, World War II, and the 1952 Revolution. The Chaco War was the last territorial loss for the country, but, more importantly it politicized a generation, both politically and militarily, to seek change. World War II and the need for tin kept the economy moving forward. The 1952 Bolivian Revolution caused drastic political, social, and economic changes. Most important, universal suffrage promised the majority Indian population more voice in government and massive land reform was decreed to improve life for the poor.

The Chaco War

The Chaco War with Paraguay was fought to regain the Chaco and gain access to the sea via the navigable Paraguay River. Both were needed for economic growth and for oil exploration. Control of the Paraguay River and the Chaco region also affected the production of *yerba maté*, Paraguay's major export.²⁹ A series of escalating border incidents were the impetus for war. Convinced that Bolivia's larger army could win, President Daniel Salamanca broke diplomatic relations and declared war on Paraguay in 1932.

On paper, the Bolivians had a huge advantage over the Paraguayans. Bolivia had more national resources, including population, and a larger Army, trained by German expatriates. However, the Army was filled with conscripted and ill-trained Indians from the *Altiplano*, most of whom had never been out of their villages. Relocation to the harsh climate of the Chaco resulted in enormous non-battle casualties from sickness, hunger, and dehydration. Led by former German General Hans Kundt, the army launched World War I style mass assaults that proved disastrous. A 1,000-mile long road was the sole supply line for the Bolivians, further hampering operations.³⁰ Bolivian losses were staggering: 65,000 of the 250,000-man Army were killed, deserted, or perished in captivity.³¹ With a population of only 2 million, Bolivian per capita losses rivaled French and British losses in the First World War.³² Paraguay suffered as well. They lost 36,000 soldiers of 140,000 mobilized.³³ After three years of fighting the Paraguayan army forced the Bolivians out of the Chaco.

The Chaco War was traumatic to Bolivia. The loss of territory and prestige was yet another blow to the national psyche. Bolivia lost 115,000 more square miles of territory, about a fifth of the country.³⁴ It was the catalyst for political change. The veterans became the “Chaco Generation” and pushed for political and military reforms for the next three decades.³⁵ The defeat in the Chaco set the stage for the 1952 Bolivian National Revolution.



Víctor Paz Estenssoro led the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR) during the 1952 Bolivian National Revolution. He served as president in 1952-1956, 1960-1964, and after re-election in 1964, was ousted by a coup. He was elected again and served from 1985-1989.

The 1952 Bolivian National Revolution

The Chaco War was a turning point for Bolivia. Although legally a democracy, the predominately white electorate constituted only 5% of the population. Indian veterans returned to their villages without the right to vote and little, if any, political power. In 1941, Víctor Paz Estenssoro led the formation of the *Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario* (MNR), the Nationalist Revolutionary Movement. It grew in strength during World War II and afterward by aligning itself with the miners unions, the strongest in the country.³⁸ In 1949 the MNR staged a popular uprising that was quickly crushed by the military. Víctor Paz Estenssoro and other party leaders fled into exile and devoted themselves to reorganizing for the next three years.³⁹

On 9 April 1952, a new successful MNR revolt became the Bolivian National Revolution. This was not a bloodless coup d'état. Over 1,500 died bringing the MNR to power.⁴⁰ Víctor Paz Estenssoro was quickly elected president. The MNR implemented wide-ranging reforms, including universal adult suffrage, massive land reform, rural education, and nationalization of the tin mines. The national government for the first time in the country's history worked to integrate the Indians (the majority of the population) into the national social structure. To prevent a military coup d'état, the Bolivian Army was abolished and the military academy closed. Both were reinstated within the first six months of the MNR administration, but with a new mission, to promote civic action throughout the country.⁴¹

The MNR stayed in power for an unprecedented twelve years.⁴² Paz Estenssoro's vice-president, Hernán Siles Zuazo, succeeded him in 1956. Paz Estenssoro was re-elected for a second time in 1960 and changed

Bolivia during WWII

Bolivia did not provide combat forces for WWII, but it proved crucial to the Allied victory as a supplier of critically needed materials. With the loss of Asian tin markets to the Japanese, Bolivia became the largest supplier for the Allies. By 1945 Bolivia provided half of the world's tin.³⁶ The United States and Great Britain also bought large quantities of oil, wolfram, lead, and bismuth for wartime industries.³⁷ Minerals were not the only item supplied; Bolivia became a leading source of quinine to fight malaria. While there was a vocal sympathetic group of pro-German Bolivians, the government signed the “Declaration of the United Nations,” and joined the Allies on 27 April 1943.

the constitution to enable himself to run again in 1964. After he won the 1964 election with 70% of the vote, the military staged a *coup d'état*.⁴³

General Alfredo Ovando Candía was the Army commander who led the 1964 coup. He and René Barrientos were co-presidents from 1964 to 1966.

Ovando became president in 1969, but he was overthrown by a military coup.



The 1964 Coup

On 4 November 1964, the Vice President, General René Barrientos, and the Army Commander, General Alfredo Ovando Candía, overthrew the MNR government. The new junta called its action a “restorative revolution” to stop MNR excesses and eliminate corruption.⁴⁴ Barrientos and Ovando ruled jointly in a military junta for two years until 2 January 1966, when Barrientos resigned and ran for president. He won the election with 54% of the popular vote and took office on 6 August 1966.⁴⁵ General Ovando continued as the Army Commander.⁴⁶

Conclusion

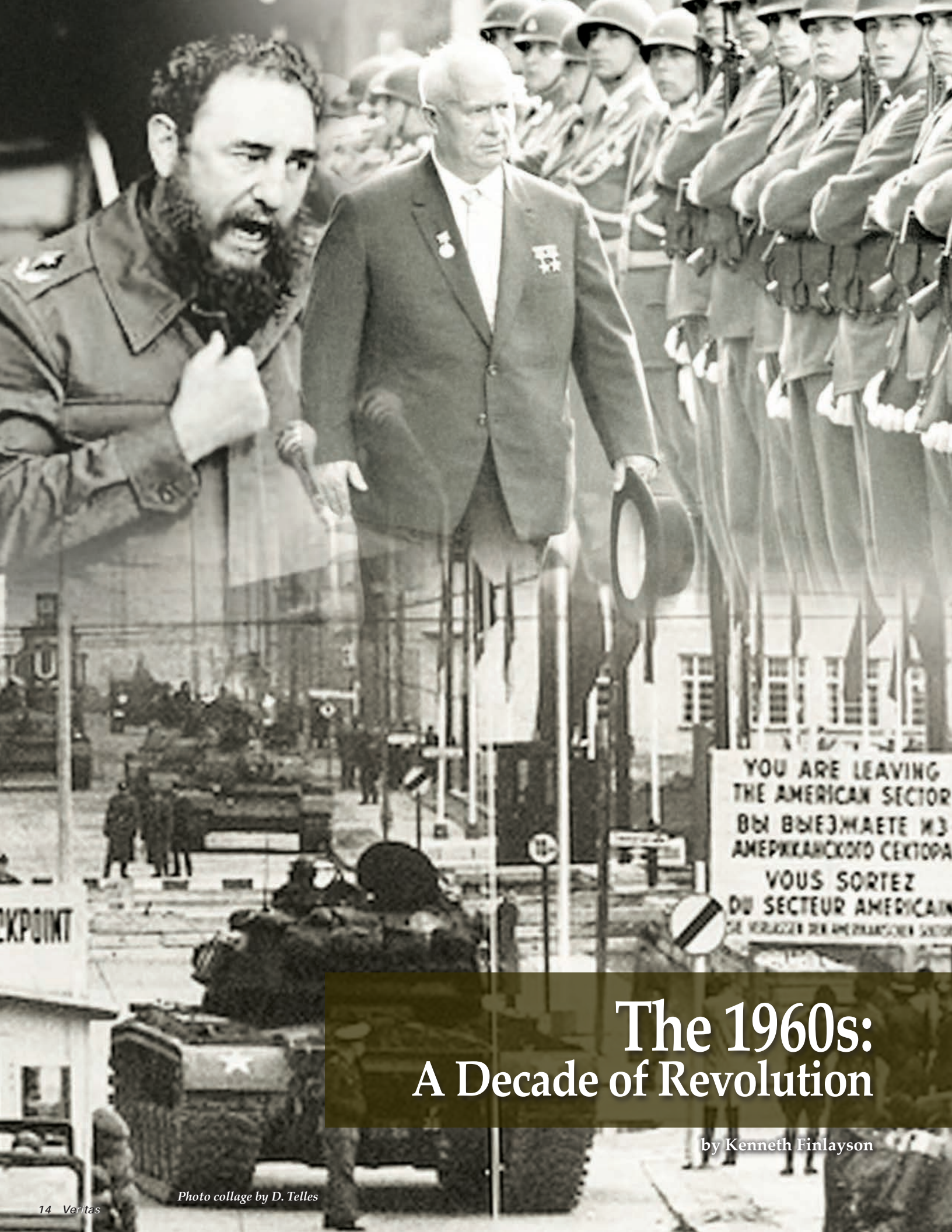
In 1967, Bolivia appeared ready for change. The 1964 coup put the military back in power, but after the 1966 election, the Army returned to its barracks. Three major events shaped the country: the War of the Pacific during which Bolivia lost a mineral rich area, making it a landlocked country; the Chaco War resulted in more territorial losses, but more importantly, severely reduced

its manpower for twenty years; and the 1952 Revolution redefined the political, social, and economic landscape. In Che Guevara's estimation, Bolivia, with its history of instability and a disenfranchised Indian population, was the perfect breeding ground for revolution. Bolivia became his test case for launching revolution throughout South America. ♣

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- 1 Waltraud Q. Morales, *Bolivia: Land of Struggle* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992), 1; Robert J. Alexander, *The Bolivian National Revolution* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1958), 3.
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- 3 Morales, *A Brief History of Bolivia*, xxi-xxii; Marguerite A. Kistler, *Bolivia* (San Diego, CA: Lucent Books, 2004), 12; Louis Barron, ed., *Worldmark Encyclopedia of the Nations* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 19.
- 4 Kistler, *Bolivia*, 14-16.
- 5 Morales, *Bolivia: Land of Struggle*, 15.
- 6 Kistler, *Bolivia*, 17-18.
- 7 Morales, *A Brief History of Bolivia*, xxv; Kistler, *Bolivia*, 19.
- 8 Morales, *Bolivia: Land of Struggle*, 15-16.
- 9 Kistler, *Bolivia*, 20.
- 10 Alexander, *Bolivia: Past, Present, and Future of Its Politics*, 12; Morales, *Bolivia: Land of Struggle*, 19.
- 11 The vegetation includes a wide variety of cacti and the mineral-rich *Quebracho* tree. The *Quebracho* tree provides both tannin (used in tanning hides) and a very hard timber, making a prized commodity. The etymology of the name is Spanish. It is a derivative from *quebrahacha*, meaning "ax-breaker."
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- 15 Morales, *A Brief History of Bolivia*, 7; The kingdom or empire is "Inca," after the ruler who was referred to as "The Inca." The language and the people are Quechua, which is still spoken in Bolivia and Peru.
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- 25 The War of the Pacific (1879-1883) is also known as the Saltpeter War or the Guano War because of the guano and nitrates. Nitrates were used as fertilizer and a major explosive ingredient, which made the arid area economically important. Later discoveries of copper and other minerals increased the economic value of the region.
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- 40 Bethell, *The Cambridge History of Latin America, Volume VIII*, 542; Morales, *A Brief History of Bolivia*, 140.
- 41 Bethell, *The Cambridge History of Latin America, Volume VIII*, 542-544; Alexander, *The Bolivian National Revolution*, 146-150; Dunkerley, *Rebellion in the Veins*, 49-51; Harris, *Che Guevara's Last Mission*, 63-64; The military academy and other military functions were closed down for about eight weeks (Dunkerley, *Rebellion in the Veins*, 49).
- 42 Bethell, *The Cambridge History of Latin America, Volume VIII*, 551-552.
- 43 Bethell, *The Cambridge History of Latin America, Volume VIII*, 556.
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- 45 Morales, *A Brief History of Bolivia*, 171; Klein, *Bolivia: The Evolution of a Multi-Ethnic Society*, 194; Morales, *Bolivia: Land of Struggle*, 88; Harris, *Che Guevara's Last Mission*, 64.
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The 1960s: A Decade of Revolution

by Kenneth Finlayson

Photo collage by D. Telles

The decade of the 1960s witnessed profound change in the established world order. The post-WW II global configuration was essentially bi-polar, with the United States-led West aligned against the Soviet-dominated East. In the 1960s, this split along ideological and economic lines divided the world into five centers of power: the Soviet Union and its satellites; Communist China and Southeast Asia; Europe and the United States; Africa; and Latin America. This article will look briefly at each of these regions and the general United States foreign policy strategy for each. The emphasis will be on Latin America, in particular Bolivia, and events such as Cuban-instigated insurgencies, affecting U.S. engagement in the southern hemisphere. In Latin America, Cuban-sponsored revolutionary fervor was a major factor in determining the U.S. strategy.

The Allied powers determined at the end of World War II the Security Council's permanent membership in the newly formed United Nations (Chiang K'ai Shek's Nationalist China, not Communist China, held a permanent seat). The power blocs of the Fifties began to erode in the Sixties. It was the Soviet Union that faced off against the West in the Cold War, and instigated such provocations as the erection of the Berlin Wall.¹

In the immediate post-War period, U.S. nuclear superiority caused the Soviet Union to forcibly integrate the countries of Eastern Europe into the Warsaw Pact as a buffer and a counter to NATO.² As the Soviets achieved nuclear parity with the United States, the

The Berlin Wall divided East and West Berlin for 28 years. Construction by the German Democratic Republic began on 13 August 1961. The Wall collapsed on 9 November 1989 to pave the way for German reunification.



Mao Zedong (R) with Associated Press correspondent John Roderick in Yenang China, 1946. Mao's Peoples Republic of China broke with the Soviet Union in the 1960s, resulting in two Communist spheres of influence in the world.



In the 1960s, cracks began to appear in the monolithic Soviet bloc when Alexander Dubček presented a less repressive regime in Czechoslovakia. The "Prague Spring" was ruthlessly suppressed by the Soviet Army in 1968.



Wars of National Liberation

"It is our duty to support the sacred struggle of the oppressed peoples and their just anti-imperialist wars of national liberation."

Nikita S. Khrushchev, June 1960¹

Post-World War II Wars of National Liberation are defined as those conflicts fought by indigenous military groups against an imperial power in the name of self-determination. The purpose is the violent pursuit of political change; to create a new nation state grounded in some kind of cultural community. Overwhelmingly based on guerrilla warfare, Wars of National Liberation were the predominant form of conflict in the 1960s. An example today would be Chechnya, where the Muslim Chechens are fighting for independence from Russia. *Map by D. Telles.*

Wars of National Liberation in the 1960s:



Endnotes

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fear of a global nuclear war receded and the Eastern bloc countries sought relief from repressive Soviet control. In the Sixties, the Soviet Bloc began to show signs of disintegration. Yugoslavia, Albania, and Czechoslovakia all rebelled against Russian rule. The Soviet Union, while maintaining control over its Eastern European satellites, worked diligently to foster the spread of Communism abroad as it had in the 1950s. In his address to the United Nations General Assembly in June 1960, Nikita Khrushchev asserted the Soviet Union's support to "Just Wars of National Liberation."³ Containment of Communism was the cornerstone of the United States and European strategy.

In the post-War era, Western Europe was divided over the best approach to meet the Soviet threat and on the question of how to deal with the divided Germany.⁴ The Marshall Plan poured billions of U.S. dollars into Europe and Japan to put the war-torn nations back on their feet. Protected by NATO forces and reinforced by the nuclear arsenals of the West, the governments

of Western Europe were popularly elected democracies or constitutional monarchies. The fundamental issue facing the Europeans was their political and economic alignment in response to the Soviet threat.

The nations of Europe did align in 1949 under the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, (NATO), but the cohesive nature of the alliance was disrupted when France withdrew in 1966. In spite of this, the nations of Western Europe remained stable and committed to opposing the Soviets. There was a genuine desire to advance European economic progress and a reluctance to see the spread of nuclear weapons.⁵ Outside of Europe, notably in Asia and Africa, things were far from stable.

In the former French colonial holdings in Indochina, Communist North Vietnam under Ho Chi Minh was waging a war against the U.S.-backed South Vietnamese government. Communist insurgencies threatened neighboring Laos and Cambodia, with the latter eventually falling to Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge. The United States was



Soviet Premier Nikita S. Khrushchev and U.S. President John F. Kennedy in Vienna, Austria, on 4 June 1961. After the Bay of Pigs fiasco, Khrushchev tried to intimidate the young president by sending nuclear weapons and modern armaments to Cuba.

Governments in the 1960s

Between 1962 and 1967, the world moved from one in which the majority of the nations were democracies to one in which autocratic one-party states and military juntas became more common. Latin America and Africa were the two continents most affected by the change in governments. Each figure represents 5% of the world's population. *Map by D. Telles.*

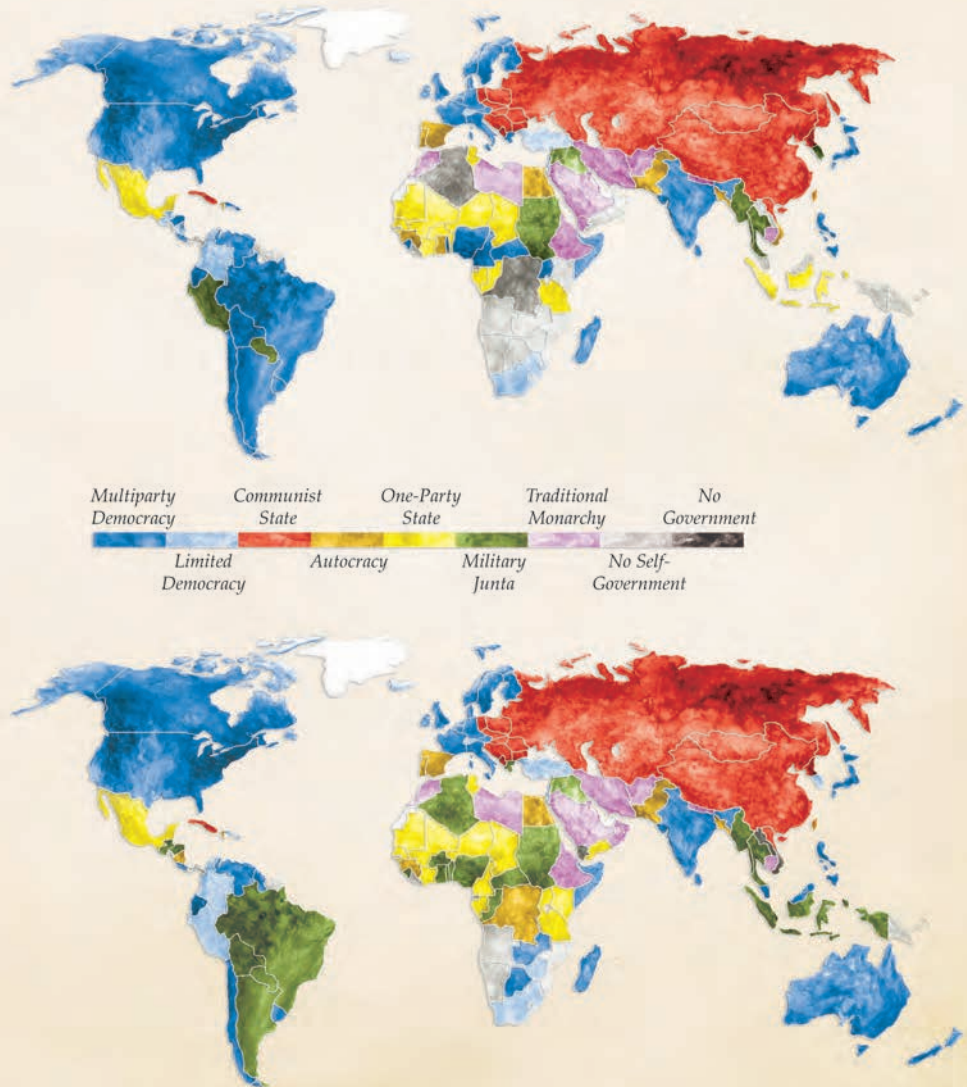
1962



World Population by Government



1967



engaged in a steadily escalating conflict in Vietnam. This came to dominate American foreign policy and the U.S. military and became the focal point of domestic unrest in America throughout the 1960s. While the United States was decisively engaged in Asia in the 1960s, the interest in Africa was minimal.

The decade of the 1960s brought more political change to the African continent than anywhere in the world. In 1959 there were 9 sovereign nations in Africa. European colonial territories comprised the remainder the continent. In one year the number of new sovereign countries jumped to 27 and continued to grow as the old imperial powers withdrew from the continent in the face

of widespread African independence movements.⁶ The transition to independence was often rocky, and many of the new nations fell under dictators or military juntas, reducing U.S. interest in Africa.⁷ This was in sharp contrast to America's role in Latin America. Two decades of U.S. preoccupation with Europe and Asia created an imbalance in American policy towards Latin America that the United States began to rectify in the 1960s.

When Secretary of State Dean M. Rusk asked, "Who speaks for Europe?" he was articulating a problem endemic to the highest levels of government, the tendency to generalize and simplify when formulating foreign policy.⁸ Latin America had a long history of



Ho Chi Minh was the Communist revolutionary who founded the Viet Minh independence movement in Vietnam during World War II. He was Prime Minister and then the President of the People's Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam) until his death in 1969. He waged war against the Japanese, then the French until 1954, then against the United States and South Vietnam until his death in 1969.

regional cooperation. The Organization of American States (OAS), founded in 1948 was one of the oldest of the regional alliances. Castro's successful Communist revolution in Cuba threw shockwaves throughout Latin America, and U.S. foreign policy became predicated on preventing the further spread of Cuban-sponsored revolution.⁹ The Cuban Missile Crisis galvanized the nations of the OAS to action; the range of the Soviet nuclear missiles threatened the entire region. The United States foreign policy in the 1960s towards Latin America reflected a mistaken idea that there existed a hemispheric Pan-American movement.¹⁰ While the United States tried to develop a coherent, "one-size fits all" policy, each of

the nations in Latin America tried to get the U.S. to treat them as a special case.¹¹

President John F. Kennedy called Latin America "the most critical area in the world," a strong indicator of the priority that he placed on the region.¹² U.S. military and economic aid steadily increased in the 1960s. By 1967, over \$6 billion in economic aid from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and \$1.7 billion via the Military Assistance Program (MAP) had been distributed in Latin America.¹³ In addition to funds, Kennedy's newly formed Peace Corps dispatched some 16,000 workers to Latin America between 1962 and 1967, to conduct civic action projects, improve agricultural practices, and help educate the local populations.¹⁴ But Latin America was not a homogenous region; it contained widely diverse countries and cultures, with greatly varying degrees of development. In the 1960s, political instability affected many countries in the region.

In 1962, the nations of Latin America were predominately multi-party democracies. By 1967, military juntas were in control in Brazil, Argentina, Peru, Bolivia, and Paraguay as well as several Central American nations. The U.S. tended to support the juntas as a bulwark against Cuban-inspired communist revolutions. The ideological initiative the U.S. enjoyed at the beginning of the decade as the promoter of democracy was lost in subsequent years by its support of non-democratic regimes.¹⁵ The presence of Fidel Castro's Communist

- A Soviet missile shoots down an American Lockheed U2 spy plane; the pilot Francis Gary Powers is captured.
- Belgian forces leave the Congo.



- Ceasefire after Chinese capture Bomdila, India.
- Algeria became independent of French rule.
- Cuban Missile Crisis.



- PLO is founded in Palestine.
- Khrushchev is deposed in Soviet Union.
- Greek-Turkish Cypriot War begins.
- Gulf of Tonkin Bay Resolution.



- China's Cultural Revolution begins.
- President Nkrumah of Ghana overthrown by army.
- France withdraws from NATO.

1960

1962

1964

1961

- Berlin Wall goes up.
- Bay of Pigs Invasion.
- Union of South Africa leaves British Commonwealth.
- Civil War in Congo.
- Alliance For Progress



1963

- United States President John F. Kennedy assassinated.
- Nuclear Test Ban Treaty.



1965

- Southern Rhodesia declares independence from Britain.
- Winston Churchill dies.



1966

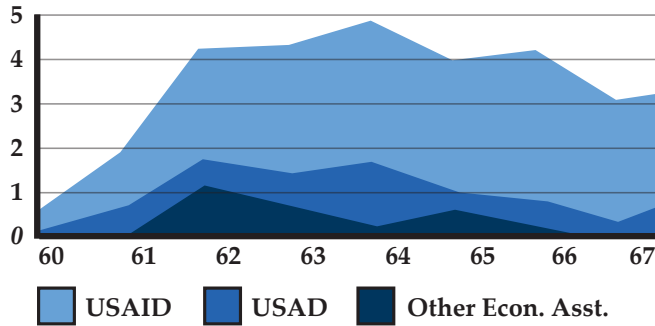
1967

- Civil War in Nigeria.
- Arab-Israeli Six-Day War.
- Anti-war Demonstrations in United States.
- Che Guevara killed in Bolivia.

1960 - 1967 International Scene

U.S. Economic Assistance

billions of 2005 \$US



U.S. economic assistance to Latin America reflected President John F. Kennedy's belief that the region was "the most critical in the world." This made Latin America the second largest recipient of U.S. aid after Asia.

Cuba encouraged many of the revolutionaries in the region to foment unrest. President Kennedy said, "Those who make peaceful revolution impossible make violent revolution inevitable."¹⁶ The revolutionary movements in Latin America had several well-defined objectives: popular participation in government; land reform in the break-up of the old feudal estates called the *latifundias*; the destruction of the ruling oligarchies that maintained them; and the main objective, economic development.¹⁷ But unlike Europe and Japan, there was no Marshall Plan equivalent for Latin America. The U.S. moved to alleviate their deficiencies with the Alliance for Progress (AFP).

The Alliance for Progress was structured to address these objectives and provide for security in the region. Formalized in August 1961, by the Charter of Punta del Este, the 20 signatory nations mapped out the vision for the Alliance for Progress that focused on agrarian reform and raising the standard of living in Latin America.¹⁸ The Alliance was founded as the response to the Cuban threat to incite revolution.¹⁹ President Kennedy called for "a vast cooperative effort, unparalleled in magnitude and nobility, to satisfy the basic need for homes, work, and land, for health and schools."²⁰ The AFP established principles for hemispheric cooperation and changed the fundamental structures of finance and economic development.²¹ But, as the decade wore on, the Alliance for Progress began to lose its effectiveness.

The AFP gradually became more about social reform than economic progress. It foundered on the resistance of the landed elites to cultural change and the nationalistic sentiments of the different countries.²² Foreign affairs analyst Philip W. Quigg noted, "With the exception of the Middle East, Latin America is the most politicized area which has not evolved an adequate tradition of public service or political responsibility."²³ This cultural mindset worked to the detriment of the reform programs. One bright spot was Bolivia, which by 1967 had received more than \$262 million in economic and military aid from the U.S. There the AFP-sponsored programs, notably land reform, were a deterrent to Cuban-sponsored revolution.



President John F. Kennedy signs the Charter of Punta del Este in August 1961. The Charter created the Alliance for Progress, Kennedy's idea for improving economic development in Latin America and countering the spread of Communist Cuban influence in the region.

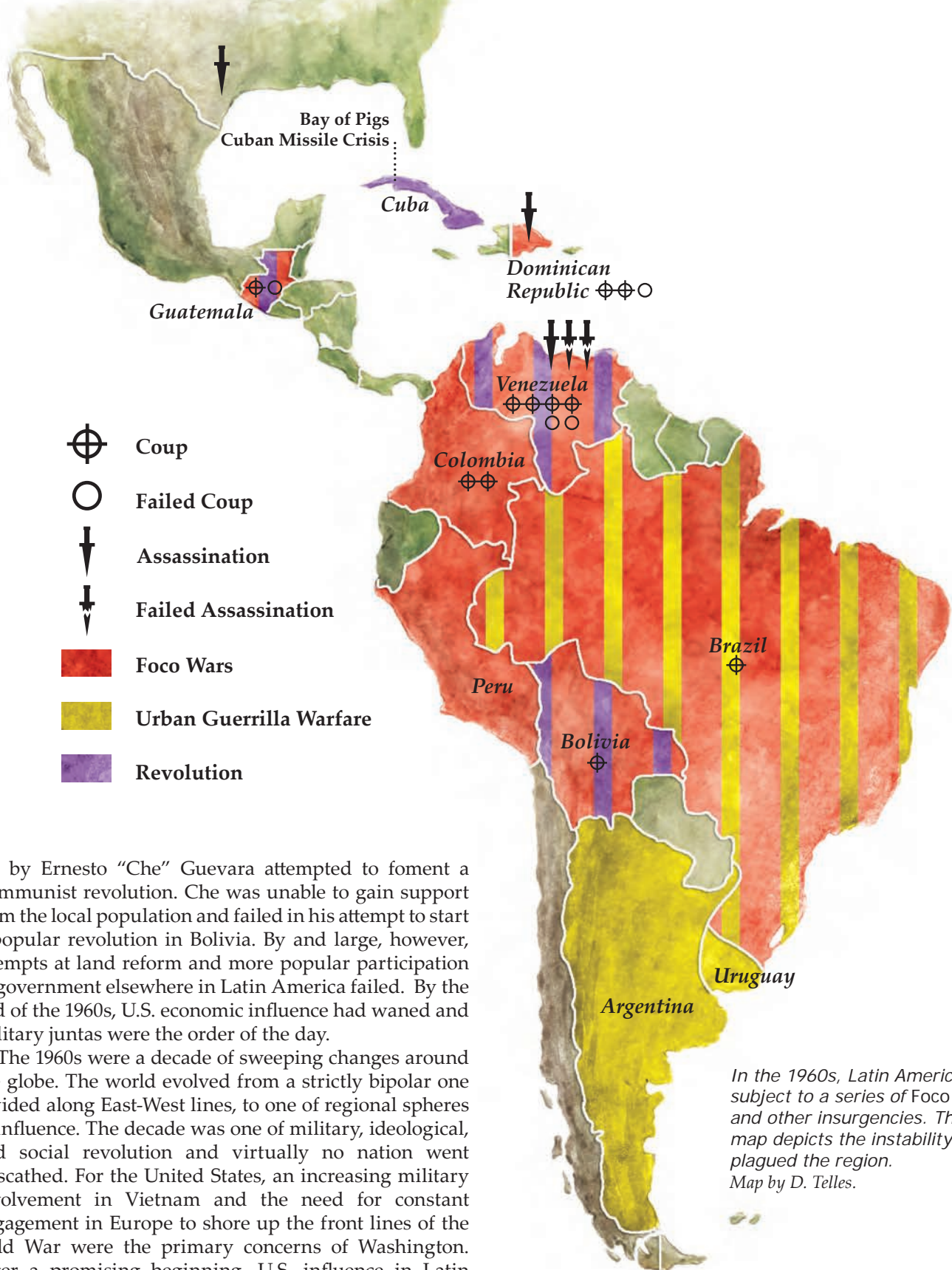
Land reform in Bolivia did work to the extent that after the 1952 revolution, many of the large *latifundias* were broken up and the land redistributed among the working classes, particularly to the indigenous population. The Indians were given title to their lands after nominal payments were made to the landowners by the government.²⁴ Over 19,536,850 acres, (nearly 31,000 square miles,) were in the hands of the Indian population by 1967.²⁵ This redistribution had far-reaching consequences when Cuban revolutionary elements

"the most critical area in the world"

— President John F. Kennedy



President John F. Kennedy greets the first Peace Corps volunteers in Washington, DC, 28 August 1961. The Peace Corps was his initiative and between 1962 and 1967, 16,000 volunteers were sent to Latin America.



led by Ernesto “Che” Guevara attempted to foment a Communist revolution. Che was unable to gain support from the local population and failed in his attempt to start a popular revolution in Bolivia. By and large, however, attempts at land reform and more popular participation in government elsewhere in Latin America failed. By the end of the 1960s, U.S. economic influence had waned and military juntas were the order of the day.

The 1960s were a decade of sweeping changes around the globe. The world evolved from a strictly bipolar one divided along East-West lines, to one of regional spheres of influence. The decade was one of military, ideological, and social revolution and virtually no nation went unscathed. For the United States, an increasing military involvement in Vietnam and the need for constant engagement in Europe to shore up the front lines of the Cold War were the primary concerns of Washington. After a promising beginning, U.S. influence in Latin America waned as the decade drew to a close. The hemisphere proved particularly susceptible to the siren song of Cuban-sponsored revolution. Bolivia, one of the poorest and most politically chaotic of the Latin American nations, was a prime target for an insurgency. But, the failure of Che’s effort is one of the few American counterinsurgency success stories in Latin America. ♣

*In the 1960s, Latin America was subject to a series of Foco wars and other insurgencies. The map depicts the instability that plagued the region.
Map by D. Telles.*

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Bolivia was one of the few Latin American countries in which land reform measures had some success. The large Indian population of Bolivia did benefit from the reforms by acquiring arable land from the large latifundias.

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- 4 René Albrecht-Carré, "Europe and the German Problem," *Orbis*, Winter 1969, 1031-1045; Klaus Bloemer, "Germany and a 'European Europe'," *Orbis*, Spring 1966, 240-246.
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The Sixties in America: Social Strife and International Conflict

by Troy J. Sacquety

Photo collage by D. Telles



Although best associated with its counter-culture (flower-power) and music, the 1960s was a tremendously turbulent decade both domestically and internationally for the United States. As historian Dr. Terry H. Anderson stated, “The long decade was an endless pageant of political and cultural protests.”¹ Other historians, Drs. George B. Tindall and David E. Shi said that “many social ills which had been festering for decades suddenly forced their way onto the national agenda.”² Any U.S. soldier—serving overseas or stateside—would have been affected by the critical issues defining this period. This was particularly true of the Civil Rights Movement and the Cold War. This article will give a brief snapshot of the decade and show the reader the chaotic nature of 1960s America in relation to both themes. This will help explain why it was so important for the U.S. to stem Communist insurrections in its own “back yard”—like those inspired by the Cubans. The “Sixties” as they became known, started off as a continuation of the socially conservative and materialistic 1950s—itsself an outgrowth of WWII—but quickly changed as many social and ethnic groups sought equality.

In the black community, the long-simmering Civil Rights Movement had gained momentum, even as it remained fragmented, multi-directional, and lacking a single leader. Although the forced integration of Little Rock Senior High School (Little Rock, Arkansas) in 1957 and sit-ins in Greensboro, North Carolina, in 1960 had gotten national attention, the “Freedom Rides,” which began in May 1961, raised awareness more. They were sponsored by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and led by James L. Farmer.

The rides were designed to test whether the southern states would uphold federal laws to desegregate interstate travel facilities regardless of local mandates. Originally thirteen participants (seven black and six white) began the rides aboard commercial *Trailways* and *Greyhound* busses.

They faced no significant opposition until reaching South Carolina. Then, hostility increased to outright violence—often while public law enforcement stood by and watched—as they traveled through the lower South.

Farmer described later events, “I was scared spitless and desperately wanted to avoid taking that ride to Jackson [Mississippi]. Alabama had chewed up the original thirteen interracial CORE Freedom Riders; they had been brutalized, hospitalized, and in one case disabled . . . blacks had been brutally pistol-whipped and clubbed with blackjacks and fists and then thrown, bloodied, into the back of the bus. Whites had been clobbered even worse for trying to intervene.”³ Television provided publicity and the momentum grew. Between June and September over 60 separate Freedom Rides took place as volunteers poured in despite the threats to life. The rides made the administration of President John F. Kennedy take notice as national attention was drawn to the Civil Rights Movement. At the same time, the violence embarrassed the United States internationally. However, the rides succeeded in forcing the desegregation of interstate travel facilities.⁴ Racial

events continued into 1962 to keep Civil Rights on the front pages of national newspapers.

James Meredith, an African-American student, attempted to enroll at the University of Mississippi, known as “Ole Miss,” but had repeatedly been



Organized by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the 1961 Freedom Rides were led by James L. Farmer (inset). Violence against the riders, evidenced by the burnt-out bus, raised public attention and garnered status for Farmer as one of the most influential leaders of the Civil Rights movement.

“The long decade was an endless pageant of political and cultural protests.”¹ — Dr. Terry H. Anderson



James H. Meredith, flanked by U.S. Marshals, was the first African-American student to attend the University of Mississippi. Supported by Mississippi's governor, Ross R. Barnett, the school's refusal to allow Meredith to attend forced President John F. Kennedy to send federal agents and troops to ensure his safety and to quell white mobs.

denied admission. The state government supported that position. After President Kennedy ordered U.S. Marshals and federal troops to Oxford, Mississippi, on 1 October 1962, Meredith was finally granted admission. Eventually 12,000 U.S. troops were required to keep and restore order at Ole Miss.⁵ But now Washington was acting on behalf of the movement.

President Lyndon B. Johnson's Memorial Day address on 30 May 1963 at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania [where President Abraham Lincoln had spoken a hundred years before] reinforced the federal government's position: "Until justice is blind to color, until education is unaware of race, until opportunity is unconcerned with the color of men's skins, emancipation will be a proclamation, not a fact."⁶ On 28 August 1963 on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C., Civil Rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. gave his famous "I Have a Dream" speech during the "March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom." The speech—considered one of the most influential in American history, ended with the words, "Let freedom ring. And when this happens, and when we allow freedom ring - when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children - black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics - will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual: 'Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!'"⁷ The speech electrified America, spurred the Movement forward, and helped to pave the way for the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which outlawed segregation and discrimination in public places, schools, and places of employment. But King's fervent speech was short-circuited by an event that shocked America.

On 21 June 1964 three Civil Rights workers, Michael Schwerner, Andrew Goldman, and James Chaney were brutally beaten and killed by Ku Klux Klan members near Philadelphia, Mississippi. The murders rocked the nation

and drew national attention. Finally the brutality being imposed on those advocating equality became abhorred and repugnant. But internally the Civil Rights Movement began to splinter, and radical groups emerged—notably the "Black Power" element—to push away from non-violent activities. This further strained relations with whites within and outside the Movement.⁸



Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have A Dream" speech inspired millions. King was assassinated in 1968 for being an outspoken leader.



Andrew Goldman, James E. Chaney, and Michael H. Schwerner were CORE workers murdered by white-supremacists on 21 June 1964 near Philadelphia, Mississippi. Their gruesome deaths forced President Lyndon B. Johnson to send in Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents because local authorities were complicit in the murders.



As Dr. Martin Luther King watches, President Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1964 on 2 July. The act, whose passage was cemented by the murders of Schwerner, Goldman, and Cheney and King's speeches, outlawed racial segregation in schools, public, places, and employment.

One of the first and most visible reactions was the Watts Riots in Los Angeles, California, that stretched from 11 to 15 August 1966. To stem the escalating violence, the military had to be called in. When order was restored, 34 people were dead, 1,000 injured, 4,000 arrested, and over \$35 million of property destroyed.⁹ Watts and other riots to come destroyed the philosophy of non-violent revolution that Martin Luther King and other early Civil Rights leaders had advocated. As one historian reflected later, "The Watts Riot was the first major lesson for the American public on the tinderbox volatility of segregated inner-city neighborhoods. The riot provided a sobering preview of the violent urban uprising of the late 1960s and helped define several hardcore political camps: militant blacks applauded the spectacle of rage; moderates lamented the riots senselessness and self-destructiveness; and conservative whites viewed the uprising as a symptom of the aggressive pace of the civil rights legislation."¹⁰ One of those in the last category was future President Richard M. Nixon. He condemned the rioters in a 15 August 1966 U.S. News and World Report editorial, by declaring that the riots were a catalyst for a general decline in Americans'

respect for law and order, and that "the nation simply can no longer tolerate men who are above the law." He cited Abraham Lincoln who said, "There is no grievance that is a fit object of redress by mob law."¹¹ But, the violence only got worse.

Black Power was most notably influenced by Malcolm X. Considered its "father," he was a member of the

Nation of Islam, a Black Muslim group that promoted the superiority of their race. Although Malcolm X later left the organization and was murdered in 1965, the outspoken, powerful orator, had a lasting influence on black America. Stokely Carmichael, chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) wanted to remove whites from black-dominated Civil Rights organizations demanding equality now. His rationale was that blacks had to achieve equality themselves, without relying on help from whites. Not surprisingly, Carmichael advocated abandoning non-violence to achieve equality: "We must wage a psychological battle on the right for black people to define themselves as they see fit, and organize themselves as they see fit . . . We are on the move for our liberation . . . Move on over, or we're going to move over you."¹² Although the U.S. Army had been integrated by the mid-1950s, racial stigmas persisted. The riots and the growing Black Power radicalism were something that American soldiers could not ignore.

The distracted military also faced threats associated with the Cold War—the arms races and inherent state of tension between the two superpower competitors; the United States and the Soviet Union. Communism was posed as a grave threat to the American way of life. In 1964, the Republican Presidential candidate, Senator Barry Goldwater, said, "The fact is that Communism is the only great threat to the peace! The fact is that Communism is a threat to every free man."¹³ This attitude permeated conservative America and made anticommunism a bipartisan national policy. While the rise of Socialism and Communism became prevalent in Latin America, after Fidel Castro's successful revolution deposed Cuban

dictator General Fulgencio Batista in 1959, the Soviet Union was perceived as America's greatest threat.

The Cold War "heated up" on 1 May 1960 when the U-2 reconnaissance aircraft piloted by Francis Gary



Francis Gary Powers was shot down over the Soviet Union on 1 May 1960 while conducting a covert reconnaissance mission. The U.S. denied that it was conducting such flights and was deeply embarrassed when the Soviets presented Powers... alive.

Powers was shot down deep inside the Soviet Union while conducting a covert flight. Powers survived and became a news spectacle who debunked U.S. government denials that it had violated Soviet airspace. The Premier of the Soviet Union, Nikita S. Khrushchev canceled the US-Soviet Summit talks in Paris. This exacerbated the rivalry between the superpowers that continued throughout the decade.¹⁴ To further fuel the Cold War, the strained relations with Cuba were torn apart by an international incident.

Newly elected President John F. Kennedy inherited the Bay of Pigs invasion authorized by President Dwight D. Eisenhower. American-Cuban exiles (Brigade 2506) were to invade the island in the spring of 1961 and overthrow the revolutionary government of Fidel Castro. The invasion took place on 17 April at a site locally known as *Bahía de Cochinos* [Bay of Pigs]. Although the invasion force got ashore, air superiority had not been established and the anticipated popular uprisings against the regime did not occur. The Cuban Revolutionary Forces, personally directed by Castro, launched airstrikes and vigorously counter-attacked. By 21 April, the remnants of Brigade 2506 had been captured or killed. President Kennedy did not authorize U.S. military intervention to insure success. Some of the captured exiles, along with several hundred Cuban citizens, were executed for their roles in the invasion.



The anti-Castro 2506 Brigade was trained by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to invade Cuba. The 17 April 1961 invasion was a disaster, and the survivors were ransomed to the United States in December 1962.



In August 1961, President John F. Kennedy, shown here with Alberto Lleras Carmargo, President of Colombia, enacted the Alliance for Progress. It was designed to bolster economies and living standards in Latin America and to counter Cuban-inspired Communist movements.

On 21 December 1962, 1,113 survivors were repatriated to the United States for \$53 million dollars worth of food and medicine. The Kennedy Administration was severely

embarrassed by the “failure that reverberated around the world” as one Bay of Pigs veteran later described it.¹⁵

The Bay of Pigs insured that the Soviet Union would have a satellite state in the hemisphere. Fearing a falling “domino effect,” the United States, henceforth, did its best to prevent the further spread of Communism in the region. To offset the image caused by the Bay of Pigs, President Kennedy pushed the Alliance for Progress for Latin America. It was to be a 10-year effort to help the economies and improve living standards in the region. U.S. officials thought that this would reduce the conditions for insurgency that allowed the Cuban revolution to succeed.

Tensions in Europe were increased on 13 August 1961, when the Soviet-dominated East German government began to erect a wall to isolate Allied-controlled West Berlin. The number of defections to the West had become an embarrassment. The “Wall” became a symbol of Soviet oppression until it was torn down in 1989. East-West tensions continued to escalate until 1962, when they came to a head in the Western Hemisphere.

One of the most pivotal events in the Cold War, having huge repercussions worldwide, was the Cuban Missile Crisis. After the Bay of Pigs fiasco, the Soviets reinforced Cuba’s defenses. Bomber and fighter aircraft, anti-aircraft weapons, and troops were provided to repel another U.S. invasion.¹⁶ On 14 October 1962, a U-2 reconnaissance flight revealed the presence of nuclear missiles in Cuba. The Soviet Union had positioned medium range ballistic missiles on the island after denying that it had furnished offensive weapons to Cuba. These Soviet nuclear weapons threatened the southeastern United States, the Caribbean, Mexico, Central America, and the northern South American nations. President Kennedy could not ignore the Soviet’s blatant act of aggression.



On 13 August 1961, East Germany began to build the Berlin Wall to separate it from the West. It became a symbol of Communist oppression until torn down in late 1989.



By 1961, Cuba had openly moved into the Soviet sphere, as Fidel Castro and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev show. The U.S. was determined not to allow another Socialist government in the Western Hemisphere.

President Kennedy and Premier Khrushchev defused the Cuban Missile Crisis. It was likely the closest that the world has come to nuclear war.



President Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, TX, on 22 November 1963 by Lee Harvey Oswald. The death of the youthful and popular President shocked America.

Instead of conducting the air strikes and land invasion recommended by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, President Kennedy decided that a naval “quarantine” to block further missiles from getting to Cuba was the

best response.¹⁷ He thought this plan would prevent the Soviets from countering with an invasion of West Berlin. The Organization of American States (OAS) supported the quarantine and several Latin American countries provided warships for the blockade. These nations were aware that any missile on Cuba could also be directed at them. Initially, the Soviet Union did not back down.

The United States alerted its forces for an invasion of Cuba to physically remove the missiles. It was assumed that if this happened, the Soviet Union, would conduct a retaliatory attack elsewhere which would cause a nuclear confrontation. U.S. reconnaissance flights continued until a U-2 was shot down over Cuba. That was most likely the closest that the world has ever come to a full-scale nuclear exchange. Fortunately, cooler heads of state prevailed.

Premier Khrushchev agreed to remove all missiles from Cuba. In return, the United States agreed that it would respect Cuba’s sovereignty and not allow another

invasion force to be based on U.S. soil. Secretly, the U.S. pledged to the Soviets that it would remove its nuclear capable missiles from Turkey. Cuba was ousted from the OAS. But, solidarity was short-lived in the region.

While touring Dallas, Texas on 22 November 1963, President Kennedy was shot and killed by Lee Harvey Oswald. Aboard *Air Force One* just two hours later, Vice-President Lyndon B. Johnson was sworn in as the 36th President. America was in shock. Its popular and youthful

president had been assassinated. Most Americans still remember where they were the moment they heard the news of President Kennedy’s death. An uncomfortable uneasiness dominated the national psyche as the United

- **May 1** - A Soviet missile shoots down an American Lockheed U2 spy plane; the pilot Francis Gary Powers is captured. U.S.-Soviet Summit meeting cancelled.

- **November 8** - In a close race, John F. Kennedy defeats Richard M. Nixon to become the youngest (43) president.

1960



- **April 17** - The Bay of Pigs Invasion fails by April 19.

- **May 4** - 13 Black and white student Freedom Riders from the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) leave Washington DC on 2 buses, to test mandated integration laws in bus stations in the deep South.

- **August 13** - Construction of the Berlin Wall begins, restricting movement between East Berlin and West Berlin and forming a clear boundary between West Germany and East Germany, Western Europe and Eastern Europe.

1961



- **October 14** - Cuban Missile Crisis begins after a U-2 flight over Cuba reveals Soviet nuclear weapons being installed. A stand-off ensued to threatened the world with nuclear war.

- **October 22** - In a televised address, U.S. President John F. Kennedy tells the nation that Soviet missiles are in Cuba.

- **October 28** - The crisis ends when Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev announces that he has ordered the removal of Soviet missile bases in Cuba.

1962



- **August 28** - Martin Luther King, Jr. delivers "I Have A Dream" speech at the Lincoln Memorial to 250,000 during the "March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom."

- **November 22** - President John F. Kennedy assassinated in Dallas, Texas, and Texas Governor John B. Connally is seriously wounded. Vice President Lyndon Baines Johnson becomes the 36th President.

1963



- **June 21** - Three civil rights workers, Michael Schwerner, Andrew Goodman, and James Chaney, are murdered near Philadelphia, Mississippi, by white supremacists.

- **November 3** - U.S. presidential election, 1964: Incumbent U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson defeats Republican challenger Barry Goldwater garnering more than 60 percent of the popular vote.

- **December 3** - Berkeley Free Speech Movement: Police arrest over 800 students at the University of California, Berkeley, following their takeover and massive sit-in at the administration building to protest the Regents' decision to forbid Vietnam War protests on university property.

1964



- **March 7** - Bloody Sunday in Selma, Alabama: Some 200 Alabama State Troopers clash with 525 civil rights demonstrators.

- **May 5** - The first draft card burnings take place at the University of California, Berkeley.

1965



- **August 1** - Sniper Charles Whitman kills 13 people and wounds 31 from atop the University of Texas tower, after earlier killing his wife and mother.

1966



- **July 15** - The Detroit race riots occur.

1967

1960-1967 United States

Timeline by L. Goddard.



On 10 August 1964, Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, giving President Johnson the authority as Commander-in-Chief to use military force in Southeast Asia without a declaration of war. The number of U.S. servicemen in Vietnam was quickly increased.



One of the most popular forms of protest in the 1960s to the escalation of combat in Vietnam was to burn draft cards. Every male from the ages of 18 to 26 had to register for military service. Most male college students received deferments until their grades became substandard.

States entered the mid-1960s.

Opposition to an escalating war in Vietnam added to the unease in America. In early August 1964, two U.S. Navy Destroyers, the USS *Turner Joy* and USS *Maddox*, were allegedly fired upon by North Vietnamese gunboats while patrolling international waters off Vietnam. The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, passed by Congress just days later, authorized President Johnson as the Commander-in-Chief to escalate military force in Vietnam without a formal declaration of war.¹⁸ The number of U.S. troops sent to South Vietnam corresponded with increased ground combat until early 1968. By then, there were more than 400,000 American servicemen in country and numerous Allied contingents. The Vietnam War was brought home to America by nightly television news coverage.¹⁹ As the U.S. role in the war became more contentious, opposition grew as the numbers of servicemen involved escalated.

Military service for two years was the norm for men from 18 to 26 years of age. Registration for the draft was mandatory for males on their eighteenth birthday. This was not a popular war. Many American youth were against the war. In 1965, draft card burning demonstrations came into vogue as opposition to the war began to tear the country's fabric. By 1967, the anti-establishment counter-culture movement—followers who were often called “hippies”—was gaining momentum, rocking the country's conservative roots. In many respects, the United States government faced an internal low-level insurgency. The opposition included several domestic terrorist organizations. In the meantime, Cuban-sponsored Wars of National Liberation became the main threats in Latin America.

Washington was determined not to allow another “Cuba” in the Western Hemisphere. In April 1965, when a populist revolt followed the coup against leftist President Juan Bosch of the Dominican Republic, President Johnson reacted quickly. U.S. Marines and the 82nd Airborne Division—supported by OAS contingents from

Brazil, Honduras, Paraguay, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica—invaded the capital of Santa Domingo to restore order. The intervention sent a signal to Latin America. The U.S. government would not tolerate another Communist country in the hemisphere. This is one of the reasons why Special Forces were sent to Bolivia in 1967: to insure that there would not be another “Cuba.”²⁰

The 1960s were a tumultuous period in American history. The pressures of Civil Rights and racial equality, combined with increasingly violent political radicalism, stretched the fabric of American society. Overseas, the Cold War and the struggle to contain the further spread of Communism dominated national policy. While America was becoming polarized at home, it had to present a strong front internationally. It was vitally important for the U.S. to become a bulwark against the spread of Communist-inspired insurgencies in Latin America. They were simply “too close to home” and posed a threat to a fragile and divided America. ▲

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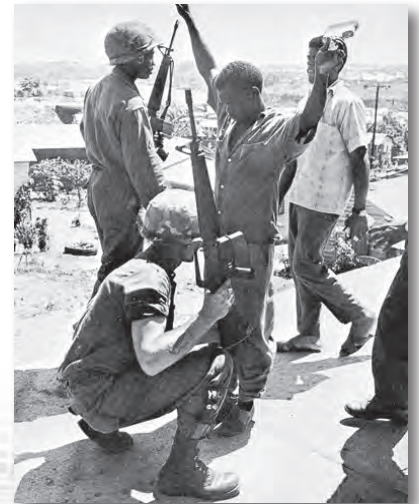
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The 1964 Tonkin Gulf Resolution allowed President Johnson to increase the number of troops in Vietnam without a declaration of war. Opposition to the war increased in conjunction with the escalation.



U.S. intervention in the Dominican Republic in April 1965 showed Latin America that Washington would permit no more "Cubans" in the Western Hemisphere.



A high-contrast, black and white photograph of Che Guevara. He is shown from the chest up, turned slightly to his left, pointing his right index finger upwards. He has a serious expression and is wearing a light-colored shirt with a dark strap over his shoulder. The background is dark and out of focus.

Che Guevara: A False Idol for Revolutionaries

by Troy J. Sacquety

In the mid-1960s, Ernesto “Che” Guevara de la Serna, was a clear threat to American foreign policy in Latin America. His role in Cuba’s Revolution, his outspoken criticism of the United States, and his propensity for armed Communist insurgencies in the Western Hemisphere, made him one of Washington’s top intelligence and military targets. “This asthmatic . . . who never went to military school or owned a brass button had a greater influence on inter-American military policies than any single man since the end of Josef Stalin.”¹ Che’s part in establishing the first Communist government in Latin America was legendary in the region. In essence, the U.S. Government was concerned by, not just Che the man, but what he proselytized on insurgency and instability. He was the Osama Bin Laden of the 1960s.

Che’s image has transcended reality to that of a romantic hero. But ask any Cuban exile in the United States today and they will say that Che was simply a ruthless Communist revolutionary.² Best known for his brutality in Cuba, he was deeply involved in unsuccessful insurgencies in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Bolivia. While not a thorough account of his life, this article summarizes Che’s youth, idealism, and the revolutionary path that led him to Bolivia.

Ernesto was born on 14 May 1928 in Rosario, Argentina, to Ernesto Guevara Lynch and Celia de la Serna.³ The first of five children, he was raised in an upper middle class family. His father was related to one of South America’s

most established families. While he squandered an inheritance, his wife, Celia, had her own and an estate that provided a small yearly income. Ernesto’s upbringing was bohemian; as a boy he was free to do as he wished. But he was born with a serious, lingering ailment.

From the age of two Ernesto suffered from severe asthma, forcing the family to live in a dry region. His father complained that “each day we found ourselves more at the mercy of that damned sickness.”⁴ The asthma made the often-bedridden Ernesto a voracious reader. He was also determined to lead an active life.

Ernesto played sports and engaged in daredevil antics to impress his friends. Although of slight build, he was especially good at rugby. His bohemian eccentricities earned him nicknames, the most unflattering being “Chanchito” (pig), because Ernesto did not bathe regularly and wore unwashed clothes for weeks. Despite his nonconformity, Guevara chose to study medicine at the University of Buenos Aires and explore the country.

On his trips Guevara noticed the vast differences in living standards between the rural population and his social class. These forays into the countryside manifested a feeling of pan-Americanism, a desire to help the poor, and reinforced his hatred of the landed aristocracy in South America and the U.S. Despite being bourgeois, he held them responsible for Latin America’s oppressed indigenous population. The adventure that most influenced the 24-year-old Ernesto began in January 1952. Partnered with Alberto Granado, he traveled through Argentina, Chile, Peru, Ecuador, Panama, Venezuela, Colombia, and the United States.⁵ After nine months of travel and discovery, Ernesto was infused with a newfound sense of direction. He returned to Buenos Aires and completed his medical studies in April 1953.

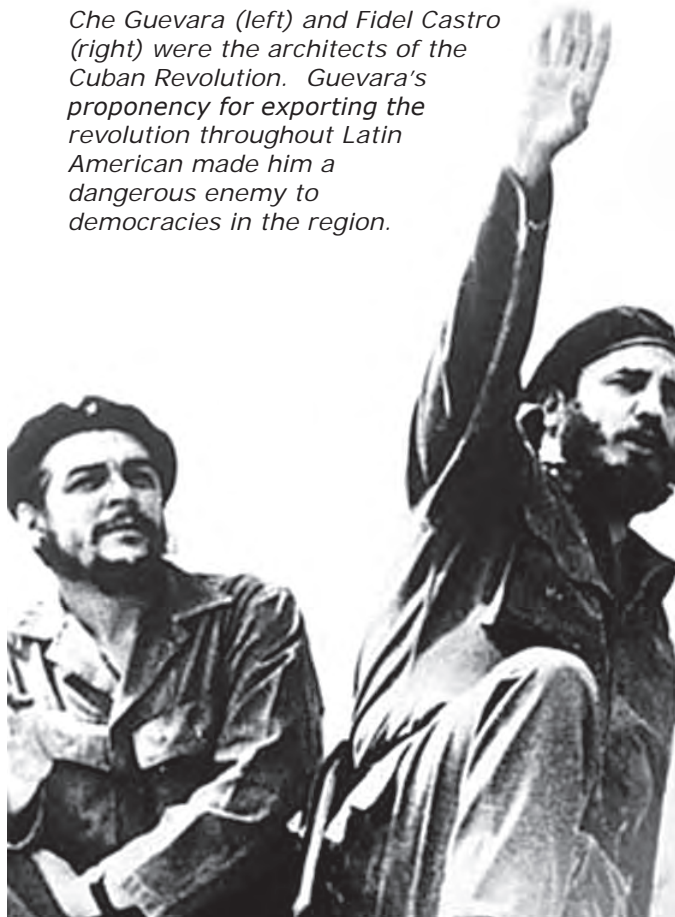
The newly minted doctor once again took to the open road. After

From the age of two, Ernesto suffered from severe asthma. He excelled at sports despite this affliction.



Che Guevara’s parents, Celia de la Serna and Ernesto Guevara Lynch, visited him in Havana shortly after the revolution succeeded.

Che Guevara (left) and Fidel Castro (right) were the architects of the Cuban Revolution. Guevara’s propensity for exporting the revolution throughout Latin American made him a dangerous enemy to democracies in the region.



observing firsthand the results of the 1952 Bolivian Revolution in La Paz, he left for Guatemala to support the socialist president, a former Army officer named Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán. There, Ernesto met his future wife, Hilda Gadea and got the nickname, “Che,” from Cuban political exile Antonio “Ñico” López who made fun of him for constantly using the Argentine expression *che* [hey!].⁶ The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) orchestrated overthrow of President Arbenz in 1954 had a profound effect on Che Guevara. Afterwards, he looked back on Guatemala as a revolution that could have succeeded if those in power had been more forceful.

Arbenz’s populism, especially land reform and cooperation with Socialists, attracted international attention. In 1954, two percent of Guatemala’s population owned 72 percent of the arable land. Since only 12 percent of that land was being used annually, Arbenz wanted to redistribute the rest. This did not please the powerful and influential U.S.-based United Fruit Company (UFC), which was Guatemala’s largest landowner. In the midst of a “Red Scare,” Washington responded to the UFC’s pleas for help, in part because America was not keen on a left-leaning government in the Western Hemisphere. Thus, the CIA trained a force in Nicaragua to overthrow Arbenz.

On 18 June 1954, nearly 500 men commanded by Carlos Castillo Armas crossed the border in four groups. Although the CIA-trained rebels were dealt severe blows, the revolt of the Guatemalan Army enabled final success. Arbenz was forced into exile. Those suspected of Socialist sympathies were arrested. Che took refuge inside the Argentine Embassy before fleeing to Mexico City.

Che’s revolutionary colleagues from Guatemala joined him there. Ñico López introduced him to Fidel Castro, whom Che thought was “intelligent, very sure of himself and of extraordinary audacity; I think there is a mutual sympathy between us.”⁷ When Castro invited him to join the 26th of July Movement, Che accepted.

Castro’s movement was the cause Che had been seeking. The group began to covertly train under the tutelage of Spanish Civil War veteran Alberto Bayo. His paramilitary regimen included revolutionary war theory, physical conditioning, hand-to-hand combat, and marksmanship. Castro did not delay his return to Cuba.

On 25 November 1956, 82 guerrillas boarded the *Granma*, an old, leaky, cabin cruiser loaded down with weapons and supplies bound for Cuba. After a rough voyage, the small force landed on 2 December at Playa Las Coloradas.⁸ Their first contact with Batista’s forces on 5 December was disastrous. The Army attacked the guerrillas while they were resting in a sugar cane field. Surprised, the confused group did not put up an organized defense, and many fled through the dense sugar cane. Those who tried to fight were either killed or

Ernesto Guevara’s travels showed him the disparity of the living standards between the urban middle class and the rural poor, fostered his Pan-Americanism.

Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz’s socialist policies caused his ouster. Guevara, who witnessed it firsthand, was greatly influenced by the 1954 coup.



Fulgencio Batista, former Army Chief of Staff and Cuban president, seized power in 1952. His authoritarian regime aroused much discontent and prompted Castro to form an underground movement to remove him from power.



Flag of the 26th of July Movement (Movimiento 26 de Julio)



The Sierra Maestras are the highest mountains in Cuba. The rugged, inaccessible terrain allowed Castro’s 26th of July Movement a secure base from which to build support. This later became key in Che’s theories on guerrilla warfare.

Castro and the Cuban Revolution.

Born 13 August 1926 on a sugar plantation near Birán, Cuba, Fidel Castro, like Che, was from a bourgeois family of "haves." His father owned or leased thousands of hectares of land. Castro entered the University of Havana in 1945 to study law and became very politically active. By the time he graduated with a Doctor of Laws degree in 1950, Castro was extremely resentful of Washington's interference in Latin American affairs.

In 1952, General Fulgencio Batista y Zaldívar, the former Army Chief of Staff and Cuban President, seized control of the popularly elected Cuban government in a *coup d'état*. Convinced that the coup was unlawful, Castro decided that an armed revolt was necessary. He formed a guerrilla movement to capture the Moncada Barracks to get the necessary weapons for a popular uprising. On 26 July 1953, Castro's amateur 135-man force was soundly defeated; nearly half of the guerrillas were killed. Survivors fled into the countryside, where they were hunted down. Castro was captured, publicly tried, and sentenced to fifteen years in prison. Less than two years later he was pardoned with family influence. He fled to Mexico in the summer of 1955, to plan, and organize another group to fight against Batista. To

commemorate the failed attack on the Moncada Barracks, Castro named his guerrilla force the *Movimiento 26 de Julio* (26th of July Movement). While some members were Communists, like his brother Raúl, it was not a requirement. The revolutionaries were simply united by their mutual hatred of Batista.

Fidel Castro, seen here with Che Guevara, was a charismatic and powerful orator. He was determined to "free" Cuba from the rule of General Fulgencio Batista.



Conditions in the Sierra Maestra were harsh, but their remoteness allowed the guerrillas to easily detect incursions by government troops. Raúl Castro is kneeling with a telescoped rifle. His brother, Fidel, is standing directly behind him.

captured. Che, Castro, and Castro's brother Raúl, were among the few that managed to escape.

The twenty-plus survivors congregated in the safety of the Sierra Maestra Mountains.⁹ Reunited, they began recruiting anti-Batista farmers. Once the urban underground cells of the 26th of July Movement discovered that there were *Granma* survivors, arms, supplies, and money trickled into the remote mountain camps. Hit and run attacks on small outlying garrisons garnered more. As the number of successful attacks grew, the group gained sympathy throughout Cuba. Castro capitalized on this by granting an exclusive interview to Herbert Matthews of the *New York Times*.

A sympathetic Matthews greatly exaggerated the number of guerrillas to "thousands."

"General Batista cannot possibly hope to suppress the Castro revolt."¹⁰ The interview showed that Havana's claims that Castro was dead were untrue. Recruits and support poured into the mountain retreats. By surviving and sticking with Castro, the Argentine proved his loyalty and dedication.

Che's fervent belief in the revolution set him apart and added to his credibility

During the Santa Clara campaign in the last weeks of 1958, Che met Aleida March. They later married (as shown at right). After her husband's death, she established the Che Guevara Studies Center.



among the Cubans as a *Granma* veteran. Although recruited as a doctor, his leadership and organizational skills prompted Castro to promote him to *Comandante* and give him command of one of the two rebel columns [at that time, Castro was the only other *Comandante*]. Fidel needed his skills in the brutal struggle.

Desperate to save his regime, Batista sent large forces into the mountains. While the rebels rarely killed enlisted soldiers who surrendered, captured insurgents expected little mercy. Castro's men were brutal with deserters. Poor living conditions made that a serious threat. Those caught were summarily tried and executed. The war quickly spread beyond the mountains.

The 26th of July Movement expanded guerrilla operations to assassinating prominent government supporters such as police and military officers. Batista launched "Operation Verano," into the Sierra Maestra in late June 1958 in response. The six-week offensive was a disaster. It was such a large psychological victory that Castro expanded combat operations into the lowlands. He took his column down to build alliances with other resistance groups.

Under pressure from the loosely united guerrilla groups, Batista's forces gave ground in late December 1958. Che's column secured numerous towns and defeated several garrison elements. The insurgency achieved success after capturing Santa Clara. Joined by Camilo Cienfuegos's column, the united guerrillas approached the city. Their 300-350 troops faced 3,500 of Batista's thoroughly demoralized soldiers.

The rebels secured the city after a series of brief engagements. When the Army fled, the way to the capital Havana, was open. Less than twelve hours after the fall of Santa Clara, Batista's government collapsed.

Guevara publicly trashed his enemies. His speeches angered the United States, and later, the Soviet Union.



Sugar was Cuba's main export and source of hard currency. Che set an example by volunteering a large portion of his free time "to the revolution," by cutting sugar cane, or working on the docks.

He escaped to the Dominican Republic on 1 January 1959. The victorious rebels rolled into Havana unopposed and took control of government buildings. He installed himself in La Cabaña, an 18th Century fortress turned prison where he presided over "revolutionary tribunals" of "war criminals" until June 1959.

Construction of the La Cabaña fortress began in 1763. At the time of the Cuban Revolution it was being used as a prison. For much of 1959, Che oversaw the trials and executions of "enemies of the revolution" here.





Several Latin American countries contributed to the U.S.-led blockade during the Cuban Missile Crisis. They realized that their countries were also within range of the Soviet Union's nuclear missiles.

Several thousand people were tried at La Cabaña. They were either sentenced to prison or executed. Former government officials, police, and army personnel who had served Batista were rounded up. Luis O. Rodriguez, a former platoon sergeant that fought in the Sierra Maestra, was arrested at home. Rodriguez described these dreadful times.

*"things were very disorganized . . . every night they would come in with a list . . . if you were called [late at night/early morning] it would mean that you were going to trial. They would tell you not to carry anything with you. [This was] contrary to if they called your name during the day and would ask you to bring your belongings if you had anything. You knew you would be transferred . . . But if you were called during the night it was a different thing. You knew that your life was almost gone . . . After they called the names for about an hour or so nothing happened. Then, all of a sudden you heard the discharge of several rifles and after a few seconds . . . the single shots [coup de grâce], sometimes one, sometimes two . . . even four. All this time we saw Che . . . calling us criminals . . . he would say 'all you guys will end up the same way. You deserve it.' We were wondering why is this guy here, he was not even a Cuban . . . He was very arrogant and cold."*¹¹



When Havana sided with the Soviet Union, it was supplied with large amounts of Russian equipment, such as this T-34/85 tank. Che was the main architect of the Cuban-Soviet relationship.

The trials shook the militaries of Latin America because large numbers of officers were summarily executed. The Cuban revolutionaries posed a threat to the professional military social class in the region. Bolstered by the success, Che began making bellicose public statements regarding insurgency and revolution.

On 27 January 1959 Che made his *Social Projections of the Rebel Army* speech. It was an ominous view of the future.

*"The revolution is not limited to the Cuban nation because it has touched the conscience of (Latin) America and seriously alerted the enemies of our peoples. The revolution has put the Latin American tyrants on guard because these are the enemies of popular regimes . . . the victory against the dictatorship is not a passing one but becomes the first step to the victory of (Latin) America."*¹²

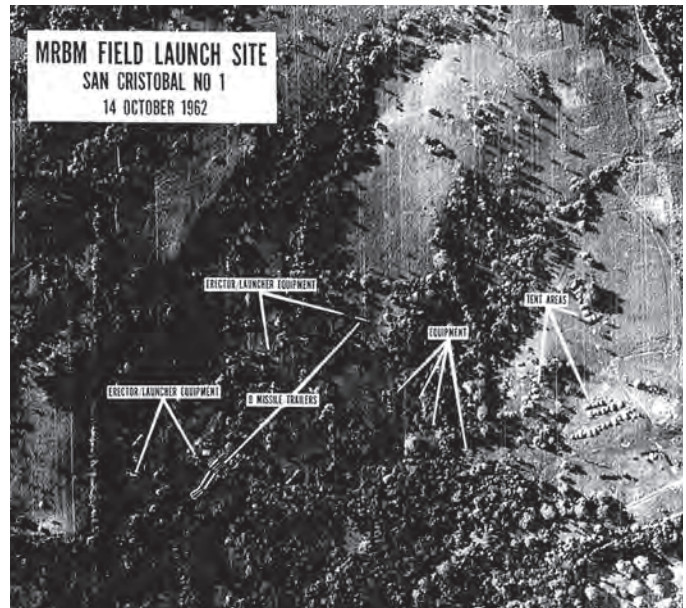
Cuba had already begun to surreptitiously support revolutionary movements in the region, forcing nearby countries to fight internal threats. At the same time, the U.S. pressured Cuba because Castro was moving to nationalize American-owned economic assets.

Domestically, Castro needed to build stability in Cuba. The executions at La Cabaña were stopped because they were attracting too much world attention. Che was sent on a three-month world tour ostensibly to garner support for the new revolutionary government and to promote sugar sales, Cuba's major export. When he returned, Guevara was

kept busy as president of the National bank and manager of nationalized foreign assets. But, Che still managed to find time to broker stronger ties with the Soviet Union.

On 3 January 1961, the United States broke diplomatic ties with Cuba because of its appropriation of U.S.-owned properties without compensation and its turn to Socialism.¹³ The Congressional quota of Cuban sugar purchased by the U.S. was abolished. That was the final impetus for Havana to move into the Soviet sphere. Russian small arms and tanks followed. Che deserved the lion's share of credit for this Soviet Cuban relationship.¹⁴ As Minister of Industries, Che forged Cuba's economic policy—despite lacking a background in business, industry, finance or government. CIA analysts assessed that this forced Castro afterwards to dedicate an inordinate amount of time to “finding remedies for the disastrous effects of the regime's early policies—largely those engineered by Guevara.”¹⁵ Casto's “revolutionary honeymoon” was about to be upset.

With President Dwight D. Eisenhower's approval, the CIA trained hundreds of anti-Castro Cubans to invade the island. The Brigade 2506 launched its disastrous invasion



Photographs taken by an American U-2 reconnaissance aircraft revealed the presence of Soviet nuclear weapons. This prompted the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Foco Theory

Che Guevara, using his experience in the Cuban Revolution, organized “lessons” into a “how-to manual,” *Guerrilla Warfare*, to serve as a primer for other guerrilla movements.¹ His central tenet was that small, mobile, revolutionary cadres would serve as the vanguard or focus (*foco*) for popular discontent. By winning symbolic military victories over government forces, these *focos* inspired public support while they expanded the revolution. There were **three basic premises**: **First**, a guerrilla movement could overthrow an established government backed by regular troops; **Second**, poor economic conditions were not key to revolutionary success (in 1958/59 Cuba was enjoying an economic boom) because combat victories could create the conditions necessary for popular support; **Third**, revolutionary guerrilla movements had to be rurally based to provide a safe haven, where they could hide and build support.² The critical message in *foco* theory was that a small group of dedicated rebels could win a “war of national liberation” and overthrow an established government relatively quickly.³ However, the foundation for Che's theory was difficult to reproduce.

Cuba had been ripe for revolution in 1958. Batista's corrupt, ruthless regime had alienated the middle class and peasants by violating basic individual rights. The army was poorly led and its troops had little fighting spirit. They were perceived as bullies backed by government authority and guns. This enabled Fidel Castro to unite the factions that opposed Batista. Che also forgot how much urban support was provided to the guerrillas in the form of money, intelligence, supplies, and recruits.⁴

Still, many aspects of *foco* were adapted by guerrilla movements in Central America [Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala] and South America [Peru, Colombia, Bolivia, Brazil, and Venezuela].⁵ Many of the leaders were trained in Cuba. Most importantly, Che Guevara's *foco* theory, which had worked in Cuba, was not exportable. It didn't matter. It captured the imagination of revolutionaries worldwide.

Endnotes

- 1 Che Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1998). Several editions of Che's book are in print. For more information, see General Alberto Bayo, *150 Questions for a Guerrilla* (United States: Panther Publications, 1963). Bayo provided the initial training in Mexico to Che and Castro before they launched their invasion of Cuba in 1956.
- 2 Che Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*, 8.
- 3 Robert L. Scheina, *Latin America's Wars: The Age of the Professional Soldier, 1900-2001; Volume Two* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's Inc, 2003), 265.
- 4 Sir Robert Thompson, consult. ed., *War in Peace*, (London: Orbis Publishing Limited, 1981), 148-149.
- 5 For the Central American *foco* wars, see William E. Odom, *On Internal War: American and Soviet Approaches to Third World Clients and Insurgents* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1992), 97, 119-120, 122. For the South American *foco* wars, see Scheina, *Latin America's Wars*, 265-277, 293.



Che Guevara's Guerrilla Warfare was intended as a manual to teach revolutionaries the necessary steps for waging an insurgency. It was based on faulty presumptions because it used the Cuban Revolution as an exportable model.

By 1961, Cuba was prepared to deal with a U.S.-backed invasion force, as this period poster declares. The Soviet-supplied and trained military dealt the U.S.-sponsored Brigade 2506 a catastrophic defeat at the Bay of Pigs in April 1961.



Important sites in the Cuban revolution.
Map by D. Telles.



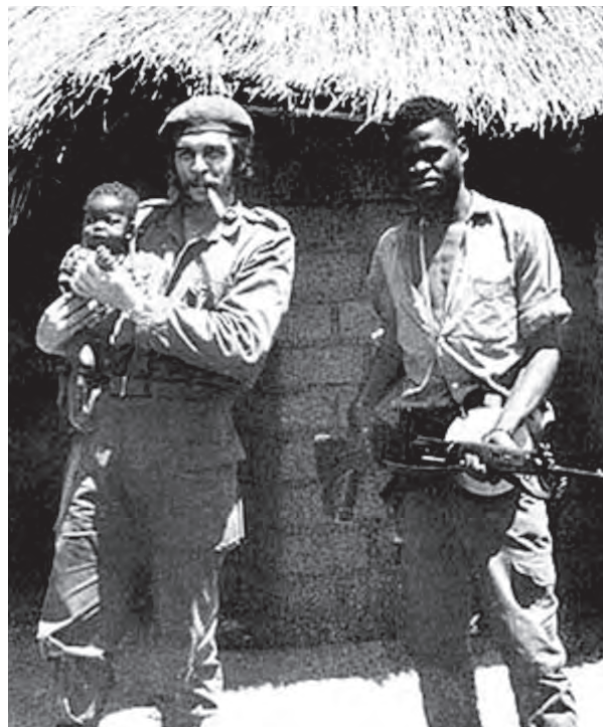
Flag of the United States-trained Brigade 2506

The Bay of Pigs invasion by the Brigade 2506 was over in days. Che did not take part in combating the United States-trained force, but later used the defeat to taunt Washington.

on 17 April 1961 at the Bay of Pigs (*Bahía de Cochinos*). The anticipated popular uprising did not occur. The newly elected president, John F. Kennedy, did not authorize U.S. military intervention and Castro's forces savagely counter-attacked.¹⁶ Four days later, the fighting had ended and more than 1,100 were taken prisoner.¹⁷ As the commander of forces in western Cuba, Che Guevara did not participate, but still taunted the Americans over the episode.

In August, while attending an Organization of American States (OAS) conference in Uruguay, Che requested a meeting with U.S. delegate Richard Goodwin. The diplomat told President Kennedy that Che "wanted to thank us very much for the invasion—that it had been a great political victory . . . and transformed them from an aggrieved little country to an equal."¹⁸

Tensions between Havana and Washington worsened during the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962. Although President Kennedy and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev averted the crisis, Che felt Soviet prestige was weakened.¹⁹ Che revealed how radical he was a few weeks afterwards by telling British journalist Sam Russell that had Cuba controlled the missiles; he would have fired them off.²⁰ The U.S. had no choice but to consider Guevara a grave threat.



Che left Cuba in 1965 and his whereabouts were unknown until he was killed in Bolivia in 1967. From April to November 1965, Guevara tried to coax success from a revolution in the Congo, but failed miserably.

Che continued his ranting on 11 December 1964 in the United Nations, when he lambasted the U.S. for its “imperialist” treatment of Latin America and the inequality shown its own minorities. He said, “How can those who do this consider themselves guardians of freedom?”²¹ Then surprisingly, Che outraged the Soviet Union in Algiers on 25 March 1965 when he called Moscow an accomplice “of imperialist exploitation,” for its trade policies with the developing world.²² After becoming somewhat of an embarrassment to Havana, he privately renounced his rank, positions, and Cuban citizenship to Fidel Castro in order to foment revolution elsewhere.²³ Castro later released the letter. The unveiling insinuated that Guevara should not return to Cuba lest he have proof that his idealism and *foco* revolutionary theory worked. “Che’s whereabouts became the world’s best-kept, most guessed-at secret,” until his death in Bolivia in October 1967.²⁴

He had already tried to sponsor *focos* in Latin America—most notably in Argentina—but the regime had been alerted and the insurgency quelled before it got started. Che then turned to Africa. There, the newly independent Democratic Republic of the Congo (from Belgium) had an ongoing internal rebellion that was receiving support from the Soviet Union and other Communist nations. To Che, the Congo “was one of the most important fields of battle,” and an ideal place to test his *foco* theory.²⁵

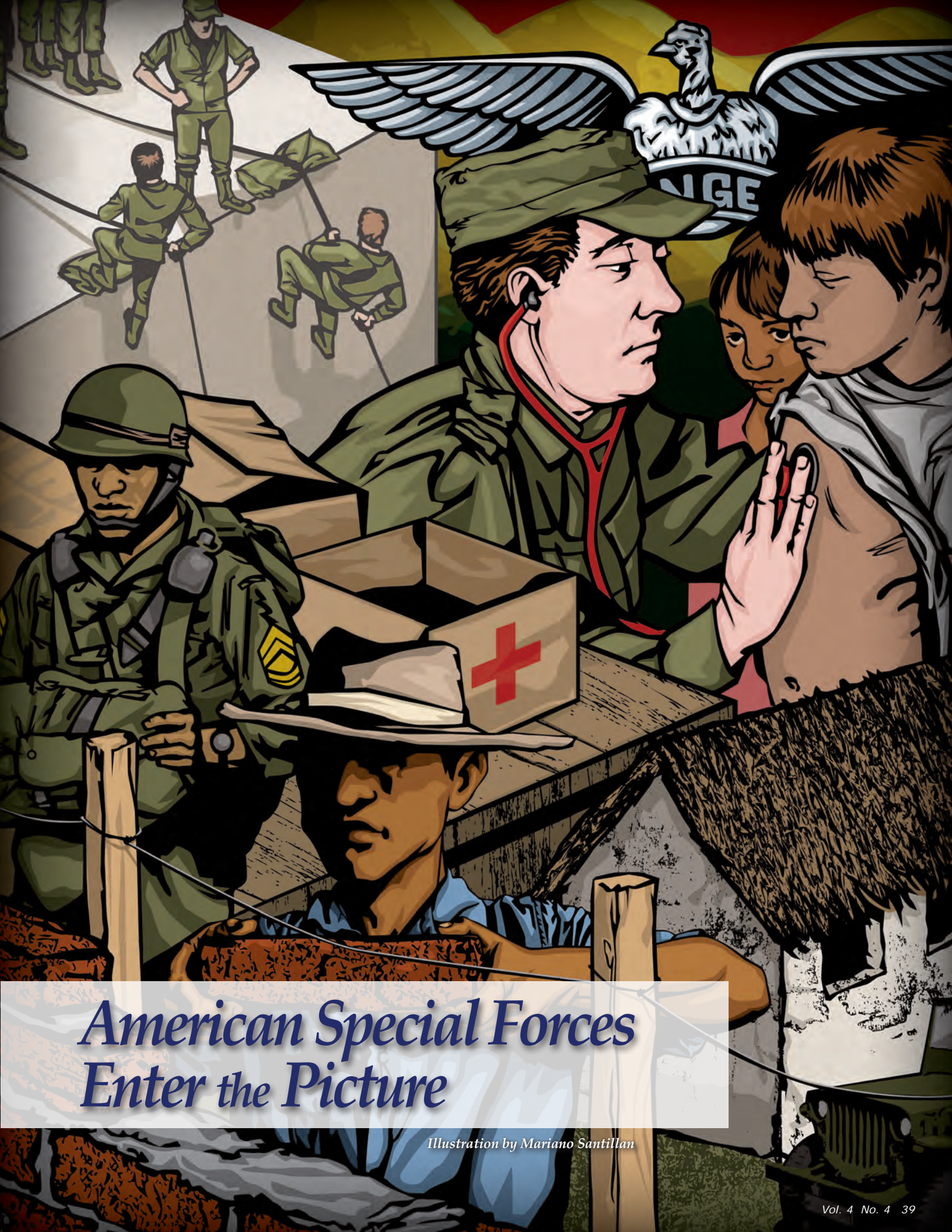
“This is a history of a failure” was the first line that Che wrote in the preface to his Congo diary.²⁶ From April to November 1965, Che pushed his *foco* concepts, but was received indifferently. He blamed his lack of success on the African rebel leaders and troops, describing them as “corrupted by inactivity,” lacking “revolutionary awareness,” and “lazy and undisciplined.” They were “the poorest example of a fighter that I have ever come across.”²⁷ But, he also learned that he had to be totally in charge of his next venture. This predilection proved fatal in Bolivia. Che went into seclusion to prepare for his next, hopefully better, expedition.

Many U.S. intelligence analysts thought that Guevara was dead. Still, because of his stature, his proven support for armed Communist revolution, and connection to Fidel Castro, Washington had to be prepared to deal with him if/when he reappeared. Communist-insurgencies inspired by Che Guevara had to be eliminated. It was finally done in Bolivia. ♣

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Endnotes

- 1 Andrew St. George, “How the U.S. Got Che,” *True* April 1969, 93.
- 2 Luis Rodriguez, interview by Dr. Troy J. Sacquety, 1 December 2008, Fort Bragg, NC, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC. Rodriguez fought with General Fulgencio Batista’s forces against Castro, and with the Brigade 2506 at the Bay of Pigs.
- 3 John Lee Anderson, *Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life* (New York: Grove Press, 1997), 3. Che’s mother was three months pregnant when she married. The birth certificate was back-dated to hide her pregnancy.
- 4 Anderson, *Che Guevara*, 13.
- 5 This trip was depicted in the 2004 film, *The Motorcycle Diaries*, and was based on the book with the same name.
- 6 The two married 18 August 1955 [they divorced in 1959], and their daughter, Hilda Beatriz, was born on 15 February 1956.
- 7 Anderson, *Che Guevara*, 175.
- 8 Sir Robert Thompson, consult. ed., *War in Peace*, (London: Orbis Publishing Limited, 1981), 146.
- 9 Anderson, *Che Guevara*, 213.
- 10 Herbert Matthews, *New York Times*, 24 February 1957; online at <http://www.cubanlibrariessolidaritygroup.org.uk/articles.asp?ID=447>, accessed 29 September 2008. <http://www.nytimes.com/packages/html/books/matthews/matthews011859.pdf>.
- 11 Rodriguez interview, 1 December 2008.
- 12 Tony Saunois, “Six In Power, Cuba Vs the Gingos,” “<http://www.socialistworld.net/pubs/che/six.html>,” accessed 15 October 2008.
- 13 U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Cuba,” found online at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ci/bgn/2886.htm>, accessed 5 December 2008.
- 14 Anderson, *Che Guevara*, 492. When the U.S. cut diplomatic ties, Havana seized all American-owned property. Thousands of Cubans fled to the U.S. as political refugees.
- 15 CIA Intelligence Memorandum, “The Fall of Che Guevara and the Changing Face of the Cuban Revolution,” 18 October 1965, found online at the National Security Archive; http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB5/cheI_1.htm, accessed 21 November 2008.
- 16 The invaders had even brought extra weapons with them to arm new recruits. Rodriguez interview, 1 December 2008.
- 17 For more on the Bay of Pigs Invasion, see Grayson Lynch, *Decision for Disaster: Betrayal at the Bay of Pigs* (Washington D.C.: Brassey’s, 1998). The survivors were later ransomed and returned to the U.S.
- 18 Richard Goodwin, Memorandum for the President, “Conversation with the Commandante Ernesto Guevara of Cuba,” 22 August 1961, found online at <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/bayofpigs/19610822.pdf>, accessed 20 November 2008.
- 19 Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, “One Hell of a Gamble”: Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy, 1958–1964 (New York, New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), 327.
- 20 Anderson, *Che Guevara*, 545.
- 21 Che Guevara, “At the United Nations,” 11 December 1964. online at <http://ils.unc.edu/~michm/Che/unations.html>, accessed 1 December 2008.
- 22 Che Guevara, “At the Afro-Asian Conference in Algeria,” found online at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/guevara/1965/02/24.htm>, accessed 1 December 2008.
- 23 Che Guevara, “Farewell Letter to Fidel Castro,” 1 April 1965, located in Ernesto Che Guevara, *Bolivian Diary* (New York, New York: Pathfinder, 2002), 71–73.
- 24 St. George, “How the U.S. Got Che,” 93.
- 25 Ernesto “Che” Guevara (ed. Daniel James), *The Complete Bolivian Diaries of Che Guevara and other Captured Documents* (New York, New York: Stein and Days, 1968), 14.
- 26 Ernesto “Che” Guevara, *The African Dream: The Diaries of the Revolutionary War in the Congo* (New York, New York: Grove Press, 2000), 1.
- 27 Guevara, *African Dream*, 226–227.



American Special Forces Enter the Picture

Illustration by Mariano Santillan



*Captain Gary Prado Salmón
on parade with B Company
2nd Ranger Battalion.*

“The ‘Haves and Have Nots’: U.S. & Bolivian Order of Battle”

By Kenneth Finlayson

When they arrived in Bolivia in April 1967, the 8th Special Forces Group Mobile Training Team (MTT) commanded by Major (MAJ) Ralph W. "Pappy" Shelton was literally the "tip of the spear" of the American effort to support Bolivia in its fight against a Cuban-sponsored insurgency. The 16 men represented a miniscule economy of force for the 1.4 million-man U.S. Army in 1967 that was fighting in South Vietnam and which was the bulk of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces defending Europe against the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact. In stark contrast was the Bolivian Army, a 15,000-man force of ill-trained conscripts with out-moded equipment, threatened by an insurgency. This friendly order of battle article will look at the United States Army forces, in particular those units and missions supporting the U.S. strategy in Latin America. It will then examine the Bolivian Armed Forces after the 1952 Revolution and the state of the Bolivian Army when MAJ Shelton and his team arrived to train the 2nd Ranger Battalion. It was clearly a case of the "Haves and Have-nots."

The United States Army of 1967 was a formidable force of thirteen infantry divisions, four armored divisions, one cavalry division, four separate infantry brigades, and an armored cavalry regiment.¹ In the Continental United States (CONUS) were two divisions (the 82nd Airborne and the 2nd Armored Division). The 25th Infantry Division was based in Hawaii (forward-deployed in Vietnam). In Alaska was the 172nd Separate Infantry Brigade. The 1st Special Forces Group was based in Okinawa, Japan, and the 7th Special Forces Group at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Two infantry divisions, the 2nd and 7th, were stationed in South Korea.² The bulk of the U.S. Army was deployed to Vietnam or stationed in Europe.



Special Forces Major Ralph W. "Pappy" Shelton commanded Mobile Training Team BL 404-67X that trained the Bolivian Ranger Battalion in 1967. A decorated Korean War veteran, Shelton was on his last deployment before retirement.

U.S. SOUTHERN COMMAND



United States Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) was the unified command responsible for Latin America. Defense of the Canal Zone, the administration of the U.S. Military Assistance Program and directing U.S. forces during hemispheric military exercises were the primary responsibilities of the command. Map by D. Telles.



U.S. Southern Command Patch



U.S. Army Forces Southern Command SSI



8th Special Forces Group Flash

Five infantry divisions (the 1st, 4th, 9th, and 25th), one partial airborne division (the 101st), the 1st Cavalry Division and the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, and three separate infantry brigades (the 196th, 199th, and 173rd Airborne) were in South Vietnam, where U.S. forces numbered roughly 400,000 in August of 1967.³ Special operations forces, under the control of 5th Special Forces Group (5th SFG), in 1967 numbered 2,745 personnel.⁴ In Europe, the U.S. Army had declined from a peak in 1962 of 277,000 to roughly 220,000 in 1967. Seventh Army had two Army Corps, the Vth and VIIth, composed of four infantry divisions (the 3rd, 5th, 8th, and 24th) and two armored divisions (the 1st and 3rd), and the 10th Special Forces Group. Elsewhere, smaller U.S. Army contingents performed economy of force missions. This was the case in Latin America.

“The main thrust of the MILGP effort is to assist the host country armed forces in developing their internal security capability.”⁹

—GEN Robert W. Porter

Central and South America were the responsibility of the United States Southern Command (SOUTHCOM). The Commander, General (GEN) Robert W. Porter, defined his tasks as “Defense of the Panama Canal, administering the Military Assistance Program (MAP) for Latin American countries, directing U.S. participation in hemispheric defense exercises, mapping and charting activities, and directing disaster relief and search and rescue operations.”⁵ SOUTHCOM was the only unified command with its own security assistance office. That indicated how important the command considered military assistance to the countries of Latin America.

The Army component command of SOUTHCOM was U.S. Army Forces Southern Command (USARSO), based at Fort Amador, in the Canal Zone of Panama. USARSO was commanded by Major General (MG)

Non-military Organizations Operating In Bolivia

While the Shelton MTT trained the Bolivian 2nd Ranger Battalion at La Esperanza, other non-military U.S. organizations were also working in Bolivia. Principal among these were the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the Peace Corps and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). USAID is an independent Federal Government agency that extends assistance to countries recovering from natural disasters, trying to escape poverty, and engaging in democratic reforms. The Peace Corps, created by President John F. Kennedy in 1960, sends volunteers worldwide to teach agricultural techniques and promote education. In 1967, there were 225 Peace Corps volunteers in Bolivia with several working in the vicinity of La Esperanza. The Central Intelligence Agency was active throughout Latin America helping friendly governments confronted by Communist insurgencies. The Shelton team had contact with CIA personnel assigned to the embassy in La Paz.

Charles L. Johnson.⁶ The 193rd Infantry Brigade had three battalions, one airborne, one mechanized, and one light infantry. Other major USARSO units were the 4th Missile Battalion (HAWK), 517th Air Defense Artillery Regiment, the 470th Military Intelligence Group, the 3rd Civil Affairs Group, U.S. Army School of the Americas, and the 8th Special Forces Group configured as a Special Action Force (8th SFG SAF).⁷ The primary focus of USARSO was the defense of the Canal Zone.⁸ The Army was represented in U.S. Military Groups (MILGP) throughout Latin America.

A relatively new concept in 1967, the MILGP and the Defense Coordination Office replaced the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) in SOUTHCOM. It

The rugged terrain and primitive road network in Bolivia made travel difficult. The United States MILGP in La Paz used air transportation to visit Bolivian Army operations in the field.



was a joint organization. As described by GEN Porter, "We have military groups in 17 Latin American countries, ranging in size from 5 persons in Panama to 103 in Brazil. The main thrust of the MILGP effort is to assist the host country armed forces in developing their internal security capability."⁹ When the 8th SFG advanced echelon (ADVON) went to Bolivia, they learned how the MILGP provided support, mostly by liaison.

The MILGP was the "doer" for military support on U.S. Ambassador Douglas Henderson's country team. Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Joseph Rice headed the MILGP detachment in Cochabamba advising the Bolivian Army NCO Academy, the *Escuela de Armas*, and the Bolivian Airborne School. He assumed the role as Ranger Battalion Project Officer. Visiting units outside La Paz was difficult because of the terrain and the primitive Bolivian road network. The mission of the MILGP was to assist the Bolivian military with its internal security. This was critical because Bolivia's military was ill prepared to combat the growing internal insurgency.

In 1967, the Bolivian Armed Forces had three services, the Navy, the Air Force, and the Army. The National Police Corps, *Cuerpo de Policia Nacional*, under the Ministry of the Interior was the same size as the Army and had a national security role. The Navy, (*Fuerza Naval Boliviana*) which included the Marines, was an 1,800-man force with four small patrol boats (purchased from the United States) patrolling Bolivia's part of Lake Titicaca and its major river systems.¹⁰ The Air Force, (*Fuerza Aérea Boliviana*) numbered less than 4,000 personnel. It had a mix of World War II and Korean War-era aircraft such as the B-25J Mitchell bomber, C-47 Skytrain, F-51D Mustang, and T-28A Trojan trainers. In 1967 the Air Force had Hiller and Sikorsky helicopters.¹¹ The 15,000-man Army (*Ejército Boliviano*), the largest of the three services, was responsible for combating the guerrillas. It was not well equipped for the counter-insurgency mission.

Bolivia's disastrous defeat by Paraguay in the Chaco War (1932-1935) still affected the Army in the 1960s.

The Special Forces MTT members conducted an airborne proficiency jump with the Bolivian Airborne School students at Cochabamba in October 1967. In the background is a Korean War-era F-51D Mustang, one of the mainstays of the Bolivian Air Force in 1967.



The Bolivian Army had long suffered from poor training and antiquated equipment. The influx of U.S. military equipment and personnel rapidly improved their capability in the 1960s. These U.S. WWII-era M-1 81 mm mortars with lightweight base plate were part of the Military Assistance Program given to the Bolivian Army.

Chaco veterans were instrumental in the success of the 1952 revolution that brought the *Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionaria* (MNR) party to power. The MNR actually dismantled the Army after taking power, replacing it with "Peoples' Militias" for three months.¹² Reestablished in July 1953, the new Bolivian Army was oriented more towards conducting civic action projects than the national defense. Eight Army divisions (of U.S. brigade size) were posted regionally throughout the country. However, most of the 15,000 soldiers were building roads and supporting agricultural programs. Only 3,000 manned the small company-sized *cuartels*, principally in the *Altiplano*.¹³ The operational readiness was in constant turmoil because each year half of the soldiers came to the end of their service. Fortunately, road building and planting potatoes did not require modern weaponry, for the Army was sorely lacking in equipment.



Bolivian Airborne School Patch

When the Special Forces team arrived to train the Bolivian Rangers, the standard infantry rifle was a Czech-made 7.62 mm Mauser. In the Ranger Battalion these were replaced with U.S. M-1 Garands and Carbines. Staff Sergeant Wendell Thompson trains a Bolivian infantryman with his Mauser on the range.



The Czechoslovakian ZB-30 7.92 mm light machine gun was used until replaced by the U.S. .30 caliber M-1919A6. Sergeant First Class Harold T. Carpenter instructs a Bolivian gunner during the deployment of the Mobile Training Team BL 404-67X.

The Bolivian Army at this time possessed a hodgepodge of weapons from a variety of sources. The standard rifle for the Bolivian soldier was the Czech-made Mauser 7.62 mm rifle left over from the Chaco War.¹⁴ The Army's crew-served weapons were primarily pre-World War II Colt and Vickers 7.65 mm water-cooled heavy machine guns; Czech ZB-30 7.92 mm light machineguns; French 82 mm mortars and some 75-mm howitzers.¹⁵ In 1959, the first shipment of American post-Korean War weapons arrived as part of the military assistance program to Bolivia. A battalion's issue of .30 caliber Garand M-1 rifles and M-1 carbines, Browning Automatic Rifles (BARs), M-1919A6 light machine guns, 60 mm mortars, 57 mm recoilless rifles, and 3.5-inch rocket launchers were the first installment of a growing American investment.¹⁶

The United States provided over 12 million in Military Assistance Program dollars to Bolivia by 1967.¹⁷ In the 1960s, Bolivia made slow, incremental progress in improving the Army's capability.

The Bolivian Army's eight divisions were the size of U.S. Army brigades (less than 2000 men each) and were made up of conscripted *campesinos* (country people), mainly Indians from the high *Altiplano* and the lowland jungles. For the Indians, completion of their Army service entitled them to full citizenship and coveted identification cards. Consequently, morale among the draftees was generally good, but their level of training was poor.

The severely constrained budget of the Bolivian Army prevented effective training of the new soldiers. Military spending (roughly \$28 million) accounted for only 2.2% of Bolivia's Gross Domestic Product, which in 1967 was estimated at \$1.287 billion.¹⁸ While Shelton's team struggled to obtain basic soldier items such as canteens

and load-bearing equipment from the US MILGP, the Bolivian Army had no field rations for its soldiers.¹⁹ The state of Bolivia's army, considered one of the weakest in Latin America, made it a prime target for revolutionaries. However, Che's dream of mounting a successful insurgency was destroyed when the U.S. trained a counterinsurgency force to eliminate the guerrilla threat.

With the influx of the \$12 million in American military aid in the 1960s, the Bolivian Army was able to motorize some infantry battalions and create a special high-altitude assault battalion with soldiers from

the *Altiplano*.²⁰ They made significant advances in the schooling of the officers and non-commissioned officers. With the assistance of the United States, they established an airborne school and battalion and a Non-commissioned Officer's

"Subversion [insurgency] was treated in a very superficial theoretical framework, without a clear directive from the general staffs or the formation of specific plans aimed at combating the rise of the guerrilla focos."²⁴

—Captain Gary Prado Salmón

School in Cochabamba. For all the services, the training of officers began with a five-year basic course at the Gualberto Villarroel Military College in La Paz.²¹ Each December the school commissioned about 95 cadets as second lieutenants to fill the Armed Forces. The graduation year groups (*promociones*) identified officers throughout their military careers. The reorganization of the Army after the 1952 Revolution ostensibly opened the officer corps to all the Bolivian ethnic groups. However, the reality was, the officer corps was still predominately of European descent with few indigenous officers in 1967. Officers and noncommissioned officers attended courses at the U.S. Army-run School of the Americas in the Canal Zone. After the Academy, Army officers attended career branch schools, a two-year staff course for promotion to major, and ultimately the National War College.²² This education strengthened the Officer and

NCO Corps, but it did not adequately address how to combat an insurgency.

Captain Gary Prado Salmón, the B Company commander in the 2nd Ranger Battalion said, “Subversion [insurgency] was treated in a very superficial theoretical framework, without a clear directive from the general staffs or the formation of specific plans aimed at combating the rise of the guerrilla *focos*.”²³ Bolivian Army officers had a European war mindset and training exercises in 1966 were “narrowly framed within the context of conventional war, as if the hemisphere were not being shaken by the explosions of guerrilla violence stretching from Guatemala to the Andes,” according to Prado.²⁴

Prado’s “explosion of violence” came when Cuban guerrillas ambushed a Bolivian Army patrol and inflicted heavy casualties in March 1967. The President of Bolivia’s response was to ask the U.S. to organize and train a Ranger Battalion to defeat the insurgency. That request brought MAJ Shelton’s team to Bolivia. The unit the Americans trained ultimately sealed the fate of Che Guevara’s nascent guerrilla movement. ▲

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Endnotes

- 1 Lieutenant General Bruce Palmer, Jr., “The Army Green Book,” *Army Magazine*, October 1967, 107.
- 2 In the case of the 1st Infantry Division and 2nd Armored Division, a brigade from each was forward deployed in Europe. In 1965 the 101st Airborne Division sent its 1st Brigade to Vietnam from its base at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, before the entire division went in 1967. Also at Fort Campbell was the 6th Infantry Division, activated in November 1967 and deactivated in July 1968. The 6th never received its full complement of troops.
- 3 George L. MacGarrigle, *Taking the Offensive: October 1966 to October 1967* (Washington DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1998), 14-15; Frank S. Basset, “The Army in Vietnam,” *Army Magazine*, October 1967, 57.
- 4 This was more than twice the size of the normal Special Forces Group. 5th SFG was the command (minus operational control) headquarters for all Special Forces activities in Vietnam from 1964 to 1971. Francis J. Kelly, *U.S. Army Special Forces: 1961-1971* (Washington, DC, Department of the Army, 1973), 82.
- 5 General Robert W. Porter, “Look South to Latin America,” *Military Review*, June 1968, 84. USSOUTHCOM was based at Quarry Heights, Panama Canal Zone. In the 1960s, the United States spent \$1.09 billion on MAP in Latin America. The leading recipient was Peru at \$124 million. Bolivia at \$20.9 million was at the low end of the spectrum. Timothy P. Wickham-Crowley, *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America: A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes Since 1956* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 73.
- 6 Palmer, “The Army Green Book,” 39.
- 7 Department of the Army Annual Historical Summary 1969, The Center of Military History, <http://www.history.army.mil/books/DAHSUM/1969/chII.htm>.



Captain Gary Prado Salmón commanded Company B, 2nd Bolivian Ranger Battalion. His unit captured Che Guevara on 8 October 1967. Prado retired as a Major General in the Bolivian Army.

- 8 The composition of the 8th SFG Special Action Force was a Group Headquarters Company, two Special Forces Companies (A&B), a Communications Company (E Company), the 9th Psychological Operations Battalion, the 148th Engineer Detachment, the 550th Military Police Detachment, the 255th Medical Detachment, 801st Military Intelligence Detachment and the 401st Army Security Agency Detachment. It was located at Fort Gulick, Panama Canal Zone.
- 9 Porter, “Look South to Latin America,” 84-85.
- 10 <http://www.armada.mil.bo/>.
- 11 In 1967, the Air Force had 82 AT-6 Texans, 33 C-47 Skytrains, 26 F-51D Mustangs and 13 Mitchell B-25 Bombers in its inventory. There were 3 Hiller UH-12B and 4 Sikorsky UH-19B helicopters. http://www.aeroflight.co.uk/waf/Americas/Bolivia/Bolivia-af_all-time-chron.htm.
- 12 Robert J. Alexander, *The Bolivian National Revolution*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1958), 145-146.
- 13 Alexander, *The Bolivian National Revolution*, 152.
- 14 Gary Prado Salmón, *The Defeat of Che Guevara: Military Response to Guerrilla Challenge in Bolivia*, (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1987), 21. The Czech Mauser was the primary rifle, with Mausers manufactured in several countries such as Argentina also in the inventory.
- 15 Prado, *The Defeat of Che Guevara: Military Response to Guerrilla Challenge in Bolivia*, 21; Frank A. Moyer, *Special Forces Foreign Weapons Handbook* (Boulder, CO: Panther Publications, 1970), 74.
- 16 Prado, *The Defeat of Che Guevara: Military Response to Guerrilla Challenge in Bolivia*, 21-22.
- 17 John D. Waghelstein, “A Theory of Revolutionary Warfare and Its Application to the Bolivian Adventure of Che Guevara,” Masters Thesis, Cornell University, July 1973, Table B, unpublished copy, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 18 Herbert S. Klein, *Bolivia: The Evolution of a Multi-Ethnic Society* (New York NY: Oxford University Press, 1992), 323: www.nationmaster.com/graph/eco_gdp-economy-gdp&date=1967.
- 19 After Action Report, MTT BL 404-67X, 22 December 1967, 4-5, copy USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 20 Prado, *The Defeat of Che Guevara: Military Response to Guerrilla Challenge in Bolivia*, 23, 213.
- 21 <http://www.country-data.com/cgi-bin/query/r-1653.html>.
- 22 John Keegan, *World Armies*, 2nd Ed. (Detroit, MI: Gale Research Company, 1983), 59-63; <http://www.country-data.com/cgi-bin/query/r-1653.html>.
- 23 Prado, *The Defeat of Che Guevara: Military Response to Guerrilla Challenge in Bolivia*, 25.
- 24 Prado, *The Defeat of Che Guevara: Military Response to Guerrilla Challenge in Bolivia*, 25.



The Bolivia Mission, Site Survey, and MTT Mission Prep

by Charles H. Briscoe

*SFC Ethyl W. Duffield explains the
60 mm mortar to the Bolivians.*

The 8th Special Forces Group (SFG), Special Action Force (SAF), Latin America, had been tasked by the U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) in Panama in early April 1967 to prepare a Mobile Training Team (MTT) for a classified mission. The MTT was to organize and train a 650-man Bolivian Ranger Battalion in basic and advanced individual military skills, basic and advanced unit tactics, COIN (counterinsurgency) operations, and conduct cadre training for the unit officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) in nineteen weeks. Major (MAJ) Ralph W. "Pappy" Shelton, the selected commander, was to organize, prepare, and deploy a large mobile training team (MTT designated BL 404-67X) for that mission as soon as possible.¹ Master Sergeant (MSG) Oliverio Gomez, the team sergeant of Team 11, A Company, was selected by COL Magnus L. Smith, the group commander, because he had a wealth of combat experience. He wore the CIB (Combat Infantryman's Badge) with two stars that signified three awards in three wars: World War II; Korea; and Vietnam.²

MAJ Shelton had several immediate tasks: to select an executive officer; to provide mission prep guidance for the MTT forming; to coordinate a site survey with the U.S. Military Group (MILGP) in La Paz; and to identify personnel to accompany him to Bolivia who would stay there as his advance echelon (ADVON). Because arranging the site survey took the most time, he chose another Korean War veteran, Captain (CPT) Edmond L. Fricke to be his Deputy. Korea and Vietnam veteran Master Sergeant (MSG) Roland J. Milliard, an Intelligence Sergeant, and SFC Hector Rivera Colon, a Heavy Weapons Sergeant from Puerto Rico, were identified to be the



MSG Oliverio Gomez

DOB: 21 December 1923
POB: Santa Monica, CA
HS: Santa Monica 1942
DLI: Russian

Army: Joined in 1943 as infantryman. New Guinea, the Philippines, Japan, 1943-1945, Inf Sqd Ldr to Plt Ldr, F Co, 126th Inf, 32nd Inf Division, BS, WIA twice; Salzburg, AU, 430th CIC agent, 1947-1950; Korea & Japan, 1950-1953, Inf Plt Sgt & Plt Ldr, 2/8th Cav, 1st Cav Division, BS, WIA; 1954-1957, Inf Plt Sgt, 24th Inf Division, Hawaii; 1957-1958, Inf Plt Sgt, 7th Inf Division, Korea; 1959-1961, Inf Plt Sgt, 8th Inf Division, Germany; 1961 joined SF & 1st SFG Abn School on Okinawa; 1962, 1st SFG MTT, Vietnam; 1964, MSG ODA Tm Sgt, 8th SFG, Panama.³



MSG Roland J. Milliard

DOB: 13 February 1933
POB: Lowell, MA
HS: Lowell HS 1950
French & Spanish

Army: Joined in 1950 as infantryman, Abn School, RR gunner, D Co, 504th Infantry; 1952-1953 Re-up for Korea, BAR & Fire Team Leader, C Co, 1/17th Infantry, 7th Inf Division, CIB; 1954-1958, SSG (E5) BCT drill instructor, Fort Dix, NJ; 1959-1962, SFC (E6) Plt Sgt, C Co, 1/27th Inf, 25th Inf Division, Hawaii; 1962 volunteered for MAAG, Vietnam, NCO Advisor, 5th ARVN Division, CIB; 1963 joined SF; 1963-1966, Hvy Wpns Sgt, ODA, 7th SFG, 1965 Belgian Congo relief w/ 3rd SFG; 1966, MSG (E-7) Intel Sgt, ODA, A Co, 8th SFG, Panama.

advance echelon (ADVON). Lieutenant Colonel Eldred E. "Red" Weber, a First Special Service Force veteran of WWII and deputy group commander, led the site survey team to Bolivia on 6 April while the rest of the team was being formed at Fort Gulick in Panama.⁴

CPT Fricke recruited officers and MSG Gomez chose sergeants from nominees provided by the A and B Company sergeant majors. Numbers and military occupational specialties (MOS) had been specified by Shelton.⁵ "The team composition was strictly seat of the pants reasoning. I thought that there would be much more classified message traffic and liaison with MILGP and the Bolivians. Hence, we were heavy on 'commo' personnel with higher security clearances and brought an extra officer. Since every SF NCO was cross-trained, it worked out," recalled the MTT commander.⁶ "I talked with some senior sergeant friends in each company to get their recommendations for personnel and to cross-check everyone. Then, I met each man individually to get a 'feel' for him and to find out what secondary skills he had. That proved very useful when we started training in Boliva," said MSG Gomez.⁷

While MSG Gomez and CPT Fricke were getting a team assembled in Panama, LTC Weber, MAJ Shelton, MSG Milliard, and SFC Rivera Colon had gone to Bolivia. They were being briefed on the Bolivian armed forces organization by the Army MILGP personnel in La Paz. A list of recommended arms, ammunition, radios, and the equipment necessary to organize the new Ranger unit based on a U.S. Army WWII infantry battalion TOE (table of organization and equipment) was compiled. Requisitions were sent to SOUTHCOM in Panama to be filled from regional war stocks.⁸

Most importantly, MAJ Shelton ran into a Panama friend, Captain "Hoss" McBride, 605th Air Commando, 6th Special Operations Squadron (SOS), Howard Air Force Base (AFB), Canal Zone, who was training Bolivian Air Force T-28 pilots in close air support at Cochabamba. McBride had established a lot of connections in Bolivia. An Army officer from the MILGP accompanied them to Santa Cruz. The Americans flew into the dirt airstrip at Santa Cruz. There they met the 8th Division commander, COL Joaquín Zenteño Anaya, and conducted a reconnaissance of the area.⁹ At the 8th Division *cuartel* the Americans met some of the conscripts being assembled to fill the new Ranger unit.¹⁰

The first training site recommended, Guabirá, was too populated and lacked space to conduct small unit maneuvers and marksmanship training. A second proposal, an abandoned sugar mill on the outskirts of La Esperanza, seven miles from Guabirá at the end of a farm road, was more remote. The mill contained sufficient buildings to house the battalion and the American training team, structures for confidence exercises, and the surrounding terrain seemed ideal for small arms marksmanship and crew-served weapons ranges. Since the small, 100-150 person village was at the end of a primitive road, the site was sufficiently isolated. Security could be maintained. The townspeople were friendly. While MSG Milliard and SFC Rivera Colon were walking the terrain around the mill choosing possible training sites and range locations, COL Zenteño Anaya confirmed that the area would be available.¹¹



Unit Insignia of the 605th Air Commando, 6th Special Operations Squadron (SOS), Howard AFB, the Panama Canal Zone.

Satisfied that La Esperanza would do, the Americans returned to La Paz. After getting LTC Weber and MAJ Shelton off to Panama on 11 April, Sergeants Milliard and Rivera Colon drove back to Santa Cruz. It was a long three days of hard driving via Cochabamba. "We drove down in a jeep. It was worse than driving that 'wonderful' Pan American Highway to Panama. The potholes were huge and rivers had washed

The communications and storage building (left) and the rappelling tower (right) in the abandoned sugar plantation near La Esperanza.



SFC Johnnie E. Reynolds, MTT S-1/S-4 Sergeant

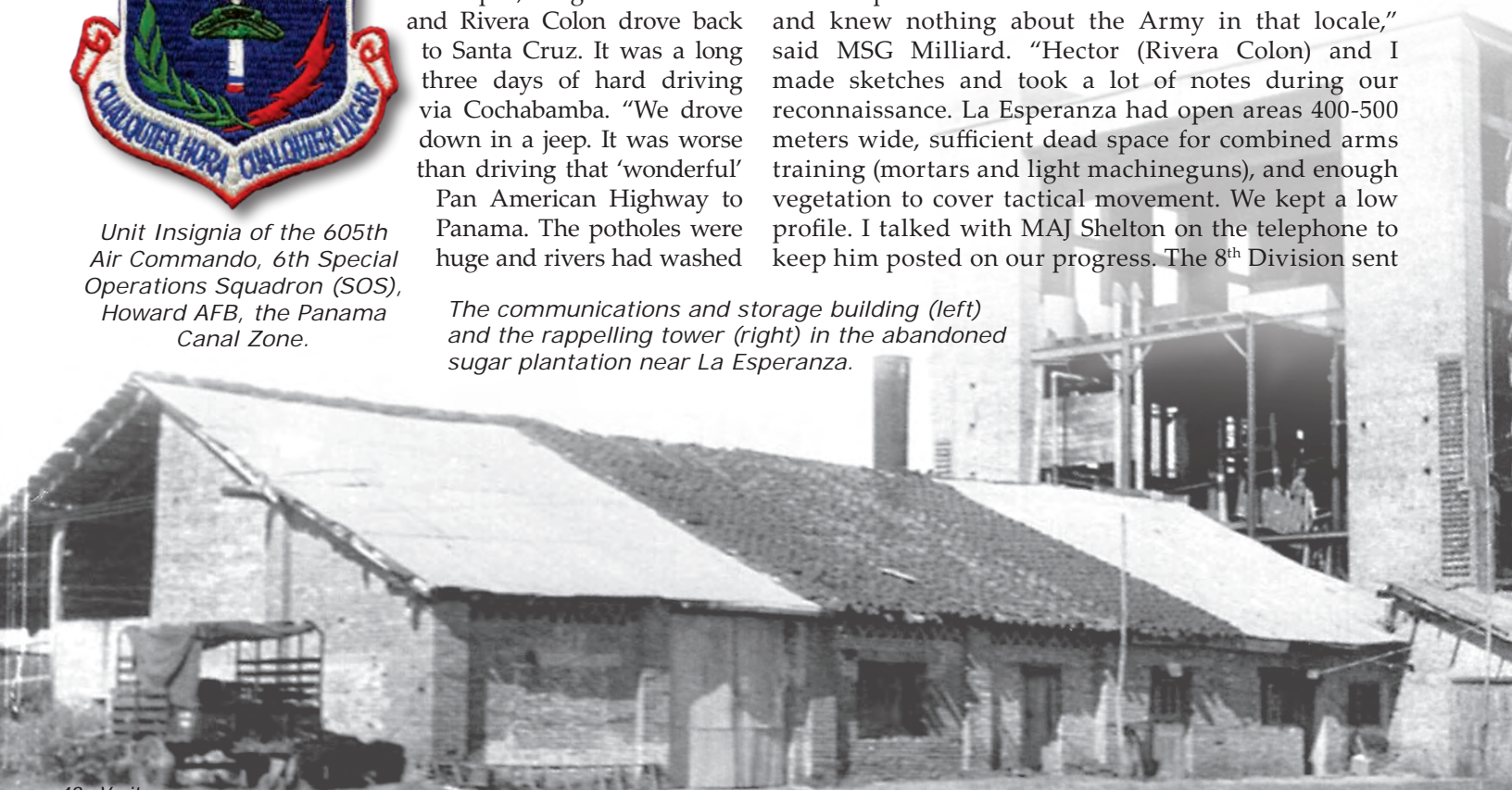
CPT Edmond L. Fricke, MTT Executive Officer/S-3



LTC Eldred E. "Red" Weber, Deputy Commanding Officer, 8th SFG and Acting Commander, 8th SFG, 2 June 1967, re-enlisting MSG Roland Milliard.

away large portions of the road. It took several hours to find safe fording sites," said MSG Milliard, the MTT O&I sergeant.¹² From a hotel in Santa Cruz the two SF sergeants began to coordinate support, arranged to have the firing ranges built, and prepared for the main body arrival two weeks later.¹³

"It became obvious when we got to Santa Cruz that MILGP personnel in La Paz had not been there and knew nothing about the Army in that locale," said MSG Milliard. "Hector (Rivera Colon) and I made sketches and took a lot of notes during our reconnaissance. La Esperanza had open areas 400-500 meters wide, sufficient dead space for combined arms training (mortars and light machineguns), and enough vegetation to cover tactical movement. We kept a low profile. I talked with MAJ Shelton on the telephone to keep him posted on our progress. The 8th Division sent



troops to La Esperanza to secure the training site. By the time the main body arrived, city newspapers were carrying stories about Che Guevara."¹⁴

Fortunately, an American company had been contracted to build roads in the area. The Paul Hardeman Construction Company had bulldozers, road graders, and other heavy equipment on hand. Sergeants Milliard and Rivera Colon met with Harry Singh, the director of operations, to explain what they needed and to obtain estimated construction costs. Singh, another friend of CPT "Hoss" McBride, proved to be a great supporter of the SF mission.¹⁵ While MSG Milliard and SFC Rivera Colon were working in Bolivia, the assembled SF MTT was preparing for the mission.

When MAJ Shelton was in Bolivia, CPT Fricke and MSG Gomez collected related programs of instruction (POIs), lesson plans, and some training aids. A footlocker full of U.S. Army field manuals in Spanish were gathered from the U.S. Army School of the Americas at Fort Gulick.¹⁶ The two leaders had chosen the remaining members of the MTT. "CPT Fricke got the other officers, CPT James Trimble, the S-1/S-4 (administration & logistics) officer and CPT Margarito Cruz, the S-2 (intelligence) officer (801st MI Detachment, 8th SAF) to prepare to teach staff procedures to the Bolivian officers assigned to the Ranger Battalion," remembered SSG James Hapka, one of the assigned medics.¹⁷ First time MTT assignees got guidance from the veterans in their units.

"Once we were selected for the MTT, the senior NCOs of A and B Company oversaw individual preparations. Then, we went into isolation at Battery Randolph, the abandoned WWII coast artillery site on Fort Gulick.



SFC Tom Carpenter, Heavy Weapons Sergeant, calls Panama on the Collins KWM2A commercial single sideband radio.



SSG William W. Burkett, the Communications Supervisor, sends a Morse Code message using the AN/GRC-109 radio. A Bolivian Ranger is cranking the generator.



SSG Wendell P. Thompson

DOB: 3 June 1938
POB: Mount Vernon, NY
HS: Pleasantville, NJ HS 1956
DLI-East: Spanish

Army: Drafted in 1963 for MP training; 1963-1964, 513 MP Det, Korat, Thailand; 1965 joined SF after Abn Tng, 6th SFG; 1965, 05B Tng 1966, Radioman, A-13, B Co, 8th SFG.¹⁹



SGT Alvin E. Graham

DOB: 16 November 1943
POB: Monterey, CA
HS: Washington HS, 1961, Phoenix, AZ
DLI-East: Spanish

Army: Enlisted in 1965, BCT Ft Polk, LA, AIT Ft Ord, CA infantry mortarman, volunteered for SF, Abn School, Ft Benning; 1966, PFC in SF radio training, graduated as SP4, 3rd SFG; 1967, assigned to ODA in B Co, 8th SFG, Panama.²⁰

This was standard procedure for missions and exercises," said Sergeant (later Staff Sergeant) Wendell P. "Thom" Thompson, a radioman on A-16, B Company. "I was single and available. We were issued a Collins KWM2A commercial single sideband radio. It was a tremendous radio [Morse Code (CW) and voice communications] compared to the AN/GRC-109 radio. Because radiomen dominated the team, I wanted a training assignment rather than being stuck on radio watch. When the major gave me .45 cal pistol training, I was happy."¹⁸ Another radioman had these memories.

"I was a single radioman at the time. Whenever I went into Colon, Panama, on pass, I paid the bar girls to talk Spanish with me for a drink. The contract Spanish language course in Washington, D.C., 'DLI-East,' [Defense Language School (vice the real one in Monterey, CA) – East] had been a total waste of time. CPT Duane Boyer, a Sioux Indian in B Company, briefed me on the mission. We were to train troops from the northern highlands of Bolivia in the southwest lowlands. Personal firearms were

not allowed. The MTT was classified SECRET. The 8th SFG signal company would operate a SIGCEN (signal center) while we were in Bolivia. One of the SF communicators 'spilled his guts' in the V.F.W. (a favorite SF watering hole outside of Fort Gulick). He was replaced the next day. The senior radio operators signed for encryption books and SOIs (Signal Operating Instructions). I read the Bolivia area handbook. I remember reading that every male in the countryside usually carried a gun," said SGT Alvin E. Graham. "We expected to run a 24-hour radio watch so we packed a lot of batteries. A few AN-PRC-6s were brought along for internal communications during the



SSG Jerald L. Peterson

DOB: 30 May 1942
POB: Bradford, PA
HS: Elder HS 1960
DLI-East: Spanish

Army: Enlisted 1961, BCT, AIT Fort Dix, NJ, as field wireman when recruited by SF; 1962, Abn School, SF medic tng; 1963, SF demo tng, Wpns Tng, D Co. 7th SFG; SADM ODA, A Co, 6th SFG; 1965, DLI-East Spanish, B Co, 8th SFG, VZ Cazador MTT.²²

tactical training and to have contact with the ranges."²¹ The SF medics had to be ready to support themselves and the Bolivian trainees for six months.

The American SF medics, Staff Sergeants (SSG) Jerald L. Peterson and James A. Hapka, would have to deal with virtually all American injuries and illnesses in country. SSG Hapka explained, "The training site at La Esperanza was quite remote. Emergency air medical evacuation from Bolivia was very unlikely. Pete (SSG Peterson) and I researched the endemic diseases using a World Health Organization reference and the Merck Manual for prophylaxes and surgical procedures for parasites; scorpion, spider, and snakebites; gunshot; and explosion-caused trauma injuries. We knew what training was to be conducted in southwest Bolivia. Hepatitis B, Yellow Fever, and Chagas Disease were rampant. Everyone on the MTT would get Gamma Globulin and Yellow Fever shots. Supposedly malaria had been eliminated in Bolivia, but mosquito nets would be used."²⁴ Note: *The Armed Forces Pest Management Board maintains a Living Hazards Database by country. "Not much known" dominated the treatment for bites and information on the more than thirty poisonous snakes (hemotoxic, myotoxic, and neurotoxic), bees, spiders, and scorpions in Bolivia today.*²⁵

"Basic field medic and emergency medical treatment



SSG James A. Hapka

DOB: 13 February 1941
POB: Milwaukee, WI
HS: West Milwaukee High 1959
Ft Bragg-Spanish

Army: Enlisted 1959, BCT Ft Leonard Wood, MO, AIT Ft Benning, GA; 1960, B Co, 1/502nd Inf, 101st Abn Division, 101st Abn School, Bn Mortar & Davy Crockett Plt Sgt Course, Mortar Btry, 1/502nd Inf; 1962 joined SF, SF medic training, Spanish language Ft Bragg; 1964, Team 11 & Sr Medic SCUBA Team, A Co, 8th SFG, Panama.²³



8th SFG monthly payday formation at Fort Gulick, Panama.

training was standard for us. Each team member was responsible for teaching classes in his specialty. Since we were all cross-trained, Pete got compass and map reading and I was assigned camouflage and concealment classes. Our basic load of medical supplies was 90 days, but we carried extra and planned for a resupply," remembered SSG Hapka.²⁶ When MAJ Shelton returned to Panama from the site survey, he shared what information the MILGP had provided and clarified the MTT mission. MAJ Shelton briefed the assembled team in Battery Randolph. "We were to organize, equip, and train a group of 600 newly conscripted soldiers. They were not a unit, but we were going to make them into one and it would be a Ranger Battalion. The training site would be an abandoned sugar mill. Shelton didn't have many details. He showed us the area on a photo imagery map. The duration of the mission was 179 days and we would fly from Howard Air Force Base to Bolivia (Santa Cruz) on two C-130 Hercules on 29 April," said SSG Hapka.²⁷ "We were not briefed in great detail, but we knew from the start that we were going to train the Bolivians to combat an ongoing insurgency," said SSG Jerald Peterson.²⁸ After his first encounter with the MILGP, Shelton realized that he should expect little more than weapons, ammunition, and equipment for the Rangers from the



Battery Randolph team isolation site before MTT.

MILGP in La Paz. “If we didn’t make commo with them regularly, we’d be out of sight, out of mind. Our life line would be 8th Group in Panama. Official visitors would fly into Santa Cruz; mountain ranges separated the widely separated cities and there was only one main highway connecting them. To get to La Paz from Santa Cruz by road, you drove to Cochabamba. There was no real road to La Paz from Santa Cruz,” said the MTT commander.²⁹ “The major compiled a list of necessities, gave it to MSG Gomez, who was an extremely experienced and organized soldier, and simply told him to ‘fill in the blanks,’” recalled SGT Al Graham, a radioman.³⁰

29 April 1967 arrived quickly. Early that morning a small convoy of 2 ½ ton trucks and a bus departed the 8th SFG area at Fort Gulick for Howard Air Force Base, fifty-five miles away on the Pacific side of Panama. Two U.S. Air Force C-130 Hercules medium transports awaited them. Fourteen soldiers, personal and team equipment, training materials (from paper targets to manuals), and an estimated six months of canned and boxed food almost filled both airplanes to capacity. “As we were taxiing out for takeoff with the ramp open, MSG Gomez leaned over to me and said, ‘You should have brought your VW bug. There’s plenty of room on the ramp. We’ll probably need it down there.’ I had to laugh because I’d sold it just before we left Gulick,” said SGT Al Graham.³¹ 8th SFG MTT-BL 404-67X was off to Bolivia. ▲

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Endnotes

1 MTT BL 404-67X, 8th Special Forces Group (Airborne), 1st Special Forces, Special Action Force, Fort Gulick, Canal Zone, Situation Report (SITREP) SUBJECT: Report of Mobile Training Team to Bolivia (RCS CSGPO-125) dated 10 December 1967, hereafter cited 8th SFG MTT BL 404-67X SITREP with date and Ralph W. Shelton interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 12 April 2007, Sweetwater, TN, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited as Shelton interview with date. **MAJ Ralph Shelton** was a Korean War veteran who was awarded his second Combat Infantryman Badge for service in Laos in 1961.

- 2 **MSG Oliverio Gomez** was a WWII (32d Infantry Division), Korean War (1st Cavalry Division), and Vietnam (1st SFG) veteran with three awards of the **Combat Infantryman's Badge**. Oliverio Gomez, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 12 November 2008, Pacific Grove, CA, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited as Gomez interview with date.
- 3 Gomez interview, 12 November 2008.
- 4 Gomez interview, 12 November 2008, Shelton interviews, 12 April 2007 and 20 October 2008 and Roland J. Milliard, telephone interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 15 October 2008, Dracut, MA, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited as Milliard interview with date.
- 5 **CPT Fricke** was a former Staff Sergeant, a Korean War veteran of the 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team (ARCT), and a Ranger Department instructor. Daniel V. Chapa interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 18 April 2008, Fort Bragg, NC. Digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited as Chapa interview with date.
- 6 Shelton interview, 20 October 2008.
- 7 Gomez interview, 14 November 2008. **Staff Sergeant (SSG) James A. Hapka, A Company, 8th SFG, was the Medical Specialist (“junior” medic) on Team 11 and MSG Gomez was his Team Sergeant and golfing buddy in Panama.** James A. Hapka, telephone interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 3 November 2008, Lawton, OK, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Hapka interview with date.
- 8 Henry Butterfield Ryan, *The Fall of Che Guevara: A Story of Soldiers, Spies, and Diplomats* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1998), 91.
- 9 Shelton interview, 1 October 2008.
- 10 Ryan, *The Fall of Che Guevara*, 91.
- 11 Shelton interviews, 13 April 2007 and 1 October 2008.
- 12 Milliard interview, 15 October 2008.
- 13 Shelton interviews, 13 April 2007 and 1 October 2008.
- 14 Shelton interviews, 13 April 2007 and 1 October 2008 and Milliard interviews, 15 and 20 October 2008.
- 15 Shelton interviews, 13 April 2007 and 1 October 2008.
- 16 Shelton interviews, 14 April 2007 and 20 October 2008 and Gomez interview, 14 November 2008.
- 17 Hapka interview, 3 November 2008 and 8th SFG MTT BL 404-67X SITREP dated 10 December 1967.
- 18 Wendell P. Thompson, telephone interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 7 January 2008, Cleveland, OH, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited as Thompson interview with date. **SGM Wendell Thompson** was drafted in 1962 and served first as a **Military Policeman (MP)** in Kerat, Thailand. After going through Special Forces radio training in 1964, he was assigned to 8th SFG in Panama. While there, he met and joined SFC Daniel Chapa, 8th SFG, on the U.S. Army Southern Command (USARSO) rifle team. When Chapa was sent to Bolivia to replace SFC Hector Rivera Colon, he asked MSG Oliverio Gomez to allow newly promoted Staff Sergeant (SSG) Thompson to help him with weapons training. Thompson interview, 20 December 2007.
- 19 Thompson interview, 20 December 2007.
- 20 Alvin E. Graham, telephone interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 16 October 2008, Phoenix, AZ, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited as Graham interview with date.
- 21 Graham interview, 16 October 2008.
- 22 Jerald L. Peterson, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 6 April 2007, Fort Bragg, NC, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited as Peterson interview and date and Peterson email to Dr. Briscoe, Subject: Personal Bio dated 28 November 2008, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 23 Hapka interview, 3 November 2008.
- 24 Hapka interview, 3 November 2008.
- 25 Armed Forces Pest Management Control Board, Living Hazards Database, Bolivia at afpmb-webmaster@osd.mil.
- 26 Hapka interview, 3 November 2008.
- 27 Hapka interview, 3 November 2008.
- 28 Daniel V. Chapa and Jerald L. Peterson, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 11 April 2007, Fort Bragg, NC, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited as Chapa and Peterson interview with date.
- 29 Shelton interview, 1 October 2008.
- 30 Graham interview, 16 October 2008.
- 31 Graham interview, 16 October 2008.



“Today a New Stage Begins”: Che Guevara in Bolivia

by Robert W. Jones, Jr.

On 7 November 1966, Ernesto “Che” Guevara began his diary with the entry, “Today a new stage begins.”¹ Disguised as a bald man with large glasses, Che using the name Adolfo Mena González, an Organization of American States researcher, entered Bolivia to launch a revolution.² He had dreamed of bringing his version of revolution to the heartland of South America while he was fighting in the Sierra Maestras of Cuba a decade earlier:

*I’ve got a plan. If some day I have to carry the revolution to the continent [South America], I will set myself up in the selva [forest or jungle] at the frontier between Bolivia and Brazil. I know the spot pretty well because I was there as a doctor. From there it is possible to put pressure on three or four countries and, by taking advantage of the frontiers and the forests you can work things so as never to be caught.*³

Foco Theory in a Thumbnail

Based on the Cuban revolutionary experience Che Guevara’s *Foco* Theory had three major tenets:

- 1 - A small cadre of agile and dedicated fighters becomes a “vanguard” or *foco* raising popular discontent against a government.
- 2 - The *foco* can then increase and manipulate the discontent, leading to a general revolt against the government.
- 3 - The best place to begin the fight is from rural areas and then expand upon gaining strength.¹

Endnotes

- 1 Ernesto Guevara (introduction by Marc Becker), *Che Guevara on Guerrilla Warfare* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 8; Daniel James, *Che Guevara A Biography* (New York: Stein and Day, 1969), 129.

Cuba became the advocate of “wars of national liberation” when 400 delegates of the newly formed Organization of Solidarity of Asian, African, and Latin American Peoples (called the *Tricontinental*) met in Havana in January 1966. A central topic of discussion was Che Guevara’s revolutionary concept. Fidel Castro publicly committed himself to this new international revolutionary movement and subsequently created the Latin American Solidarity Organization (OLAS) to control and coordinate revolutionary activities in the Western Hemisphere, with Cuba in a leadership role.⁴

Within this new framework, Che Guevara was given a major role in coordinating a revolutionary act in South America. Following his failure in the Congo, Che needed time to recover. While abroad he had become an international Communist “boogey man,” mysteriously disappearing and reappearing. U.S. and allied intelligence agencies searched for him in the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, and Colombia.

Che firmly believed that the only way to break free of imperialist oppression was to involve the United States. Multiple simultaneous uprisings in Latin America

would lead to the final defeat of the ultimate enemy, the United States. “It is the road of Vietnam; it is the road that should be followed by the people; it is the road that will be followed in Our America. . . The Cuba Revolution will today have the job of. . . creating a Second or Third Vietnam of the world.”⁵ His dilemma was where to start.

Che considered several countries, particularly Peru and his native Argentina. However, Bolivia seemed to be the best candidate, based on Cuban intelligence reports and his personal experiences. As a young man traveling through Latin America, Che stopped in Bolivia in 1953, the year after the Bolivian Revolution and was impressed by the move toward radical social reforms. Since then he became convinced that politicians, generals, and the United States had corrupted the Bolivian Revolution. However, Che’s intelligence regarding Bolivian social conditions in 1967 was highly inaccurate.

Two Bolivian communists, Roberto “Coco” Peredo Liegue and Guido “Inti” Peredo Liegue, were his primary sources of misperception. They reinforced his earlier analysis during visits to Cuba in 1962 and again in 1965.⁶ They, like many other Bolivian communists, related stories of widespread dissent with the regime of President Rene Barrientos. They ignored the fact that Barrientos had won the election with more than 60% of the vote.⁷ Guevara accepted the popular consensus that the Bolivian military was one of the most poorly organized in Latin America.⁸ All of these elements convinced Che that Bolivia was the best candidate for a *foco*.



A copy of Che's false Uruguayan passport identifying him as "Adolfo Mena González."

Che’s revolution would begin in the *corazón*, the “heart” of South America – Bolivia.⁹ The Cuban revolutionary experience in the Sierra Maestras would be the template to spread insurgency throughout the South American continent. First, the *foco* would be established with Cuban leadership and military support. Second, after organizing his *foco*, building base camps and a logistical cache, and training guerrillas would begin. Then small groups of guerrillas, using “hit and run” tactics, would harass the Bolivian Army and police. As the guerrillas became more effective, the Bolivian army had to disperse to protect towns and infrastructure. This strategy made the Army even more vulnerable to attacks. As this Cuban-led revolutionary vanguard grew in strength it would gain more support from the *campesinos*, farmers, and miners.



Haydée Tamara Bunke Bider, AKA "Tania," the Argentine-East German Communist, became one of Guevara's main agents in Bolivia. (Above counterclockwise, her Communist Party of Cuba membership card from the Ministry of Education; a photo in her Cuban revolutionary beret; and at the Nancahuazú camp taking photographs.)

Victories would demonstrate their ability to defeat the army and improve their legitimacy.

Eventually, the *foco* would gain enough strength to strike three of Bolivia's major cities: Cochabamba, Santa Cruz, and Sucre. Once the guerrillas isolated or controlled these cities, they effectively split the country. Part of the strategy would be to sever the railroad line to Argentina and the major oil pipeline between Santa Cruz and Camiri, further isolating the country.¹⁰

As the guerrilla movement gained strength and momentum, Che was convinced that the United States would send military advisors as they did in the Republic of Vietnam. Conventional units would follow the advisors. Che hoped to increase U.S. military obligations in Latin America. As the second and third "Vietnam" erupted, the American army would rapidly exhaust itself in a vain attempt to support counterinsurgency efforts.¹¹ From Inti Peredo's perspective: "As they become incapable of defeating us, the U.S. Marines will intervene, and imperialism will unleash all its deadly power. Then our struggle will become identical with the one being waged by the Vietnamese people."¹² This was only a beginning to foster regional insurgencies.

Once the Bolivian guerrilla vanguard was firmly established, it would train and support other revolutionary movements (*focos*) in Peru, Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay. The Peruvian *foco* was scheduled for the end of 1967. Eventually Che predicted that the Bolivian *foco* would defeat the government and, like Cuba, establish a revolutionary government. The *focos* still needed support, and Bolivia would become a sanctuary for the various groups. Bolivia would be the first to fall, triggering subsequent collapses to create a South American "domino effect."

There were several elements in the organization of the Bolivian *foco*. The nucleus was the Cuban revolutionary fighters. The majority of the *foco* would be locals, drawn from the ranks of the Bolivian Communist Party (BCP). The combined element would be called the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional de Bolivia* (ELNB, or National Liberation Army of Bolivia). The ELNB had to plan and build a large support network. Cuba provided the monetary and weapons support for the ELNB. Behind the scenes was a network of agents collecting intelligence and providing logistics assistance, some of whom had been in place for years. The majority of the clandestine support apparatus was built around Cuban agents coordinating with the Bolivian Communist Party in La Paz. However, there were two key foreign players, Haydée Tamara Bunke Bider and Régis Debray who played significant roles as special agents for the Bolivian *foco*.

A young woman of dual Argentine-East German nationality, Haydée Tamara Bunke Bider was best known by her code-name, "Tania." After meeting Che Guevara in East Germany in 1960, she became enthralled with his revolutionary ideas. Tania subsequently traveled to Cuba where she became active in the Cuban revolutionary movement and was recruited and trained as an agent for the Bolivia mission.¹³ Tania went to Bolivia in 1964 under the alias Laura Gutiérrez Bauer to establish contacts among the Bolivian upper class. In her cover as a researcher of indigenous folk music and as a German tutor for wealthy children, she began collecting strategic and tactical information.¹⁴ Through her network of contacts and Communist "fellow travelers" Tania obtained Bolivian press credentials for Che Guevara, Régis Debray, and Ciro Roberto Bustos (a Cuban agent from Argentina).¹⁵ In La Paz she hosted a radio advice program for the lovelorn and used it to send coded messages to Cuban intelligence. Tania was a triple agent who also worked for the Soviet KGB and the East German secret police, the "Stasi."¹⁶ The importance of her role in the Bolivian *foco* has become almost as mythologized as that of Che Guevara. The second "agent provocateur" was a French intellectual.



Régis Debray, a French Marxist theorist and intellectual. While in Bolivia he soon tired of life as a revolutionary on the ground.

Régis Debray was a Marxist theorist and "wannabe" revolutionary in his mid twenties. The Debray family was wealthy and well connected and enjoyed a high position in French society. His father was a prominent lawyer and his mother served on the Paris city council. He had obtained a position as a professor of philosophy at the University

of Havana.¹⁷ While he was there he wrote, *Revolution Within a Revolution*, chronicling the Cuban Revolution as the harbinger of a new revolutionary model for Latin America and the world.¹⁸ Cuban intelligence sent him to Bolivia to write a geopolitical analysis and gather intelligence.

Debray traveled to Bolivia in September 1966 posing as a journalist and professor “whose mission is to make a geopolitical study of the chosen zone in the Beni.”¹⁹ His travels did not go unnoticed “he [Debray] had been sighted moving around the Bolivian countryside—in Cochabamba, in the Chapare and in the Alto Beni—all regions that had been under discussion by the Cubans as possible guerrilla sites.”²⁰ He collected maps and answered Che’s questions through intermediaries in Cuba.²¹ Simultaneously, other agents supporting the effort made arrangements for the *foco*.²²

Following the template for the Cuban Revolution, agents purchased a ranch/farm in Bolivia to serve as a *foco* base. In June 1966 the Peredo brothers bought a 3,000-acre farm for 30,000 Bolivian *pesos* (about \$2,500) near Ñancahuazú in the rugged southeastern region of Bolivia. It was dubbed the *casa calamina* (the “zinc house” or “tin house” for its shiny metal roof). Located fifty miles north of Camiri, the Ñancahuazú farm sat in a very rough environment in a sparsely populated area.²³

Recruitment of Bolivians for the *foco* began in the summer of 1966. Mario Monje Molina, head of the Bolivian Communist



Bolivia with the guerrilla “Red Zone” framed. One of the justifications for selecting the Ñancahuazú area was easy access to borders and population despite the fact that the terrain canalizes traffic to river valleys or the few roads. Map by D. Telles.



Moisés Guevara Rodríguez (right) was a mine labor leader who led a breakaway Maoist faction of Bolivian Communists. Orlando (“Antonio”) Pantoja Tamayo (left) was a veteran of the Sierra Maestras and the Chief of Cuba’s Border Guard. This photo was probably taken in camp in late March 1967. Notice Guevara’s fresh look compared to Antonio’s haggard appearance after the “Long March.”

Party, promised twenty men from his organization. Moisés Guevara Rodríguez, the Maoist mine labor leader, was another source of manpower.²⁴ While the Bolivians would form the bulk of the new insurgency, Che planned to use Cuban veterans to train and lead the local recruits until they could assume responsibility for liberating their country.²⁵ Recruiting was a constant problem for the Cuban-led organization.

The Cuban veterans began infiltrating from Havana through various Eastern Bloc countries. They then continued their journey using new identities and false passports to enter different Latin America cities before slipping into Bolivia.²⁶ The incremental deployment of the Cubans lasted through 1966. Che Guevara entered Bolivia on 3 November 1966.²⁷

Che Guevara’s revolutionary dream was to liberate the Latin American people independent of Soviet influence. This supported the *Tricontinental* philosophy of an alliance of revolutionary

Some of the Key Guerrillas and Their Nicknames/Pseudonyms

One confusing aspect of Che's *Bolivian Diary* is the number of pseudonyms or nicknames used by the group members. Many had two or more nicknames. It is not known if this was a security move to disguise the names or to conceal the number of guerrillas.

Ernesto "Che" Guevara de la Serna =	Ramón, Mongo, Fernando, Fernández
Régis Debray =	Dantón, El Frances, Debre
Haydée Tamara Bunke-Bider =	Tania, María, Mary, Tamara, Laura
Juan Vitalio Acuña Nuñez =	Joaquín, Vilo
Ciro Roberto Bustos =	Carlos, Pelao, Mauricio
Juan Pablo Chang Navarro =	Chino, El Chino, Francisco, Emilio, Emiliano
Octavio de la Concepción de la Pedraja =	Moro, El Médico, Morogoro, Munganga, Mugambo, Tavito
Moisés Guevara Rodríguez =	Armando, Guevara, Moisés
José María Martínez Tamayo =	Papi, Ricardo, Chinchu, Mbili
Roberto Peredo Liegue =	Coco
Guido Alvaro Peredo Liegue =	Inti
Jorge Vázquez Machicado =	Bigotes, Loro, Jorge
Harry Villegas Tamayo =	Pombo, Carlos

A typical village in the Ñancahuazú area. In this area any stranger would be immediately noticed.

governments in the Western Hemisphere with Fidel Castro as the ideological leader.²⁸ As he waited in Cuba, Che was not alone in looking for the next revolutionary fight. Several of his compatriots from the Sierra Maestras volunteered. Of the seventeen Cubans who accompanied him on the Bolivian mission, five were "commandantes" in the Cuban army; seven others were officers of lesser rank, and one was the chief of the Border Police.²⁹ This nucleus of veterans formed the Bolivia *foco*.

Che Guevara thought the struggle in Bolivia could last "seven to ten years," and prepared for that eventuality. Construction of a permanent *foco* base began less than one kilometer from the farmhouse.³⁰ Che Guevara supervised the digging of underground caves and storage caches, and the building of an open-air classroom, a kitchen, and a dispensary.³¹ The guerrilla support organization smuggled supplies, ammunition, and weapons into the camp from La Paz, over 400 miles away. As the finishing touches were being applied to the *foco* base camp, Che directed that a second camp be built farther away from the farmhouse.³² Upon his arrival, Che realized that the farm was not as isolated as he had been led to believe. Their nearest neighbor, Ciro Algañaz, made several unannounced visits, offering to sell pigs and chickens. He suspected that the group was building a cocaine factory because of the frequent day and night vehicular activity.³³ In the sparsely populated remote area the numerous visitors attracted unwanted attention. The farm was compromised, but the Cubans remained.

The guerrillas settled into a daily routine. Supplies were carried up from the farm. Che instituted a robust education program for the guerrillas that included history, political economy, mathematics, Spanish, French, and Quechua.³⁴ Only then did he realize that although Quechua was the dominant Indian language, it was spoken in the Bolivian highlands to the south and west. The local population in the Ñancahuazú region spoke Guaraní.³⁵ The men began to treat the *foco* base as their home. The veterans committed numerous security violations: photographs were taken; diaries were kept;



and radio messages were sent almost daily.³⁶ Visitors added to the complacency.

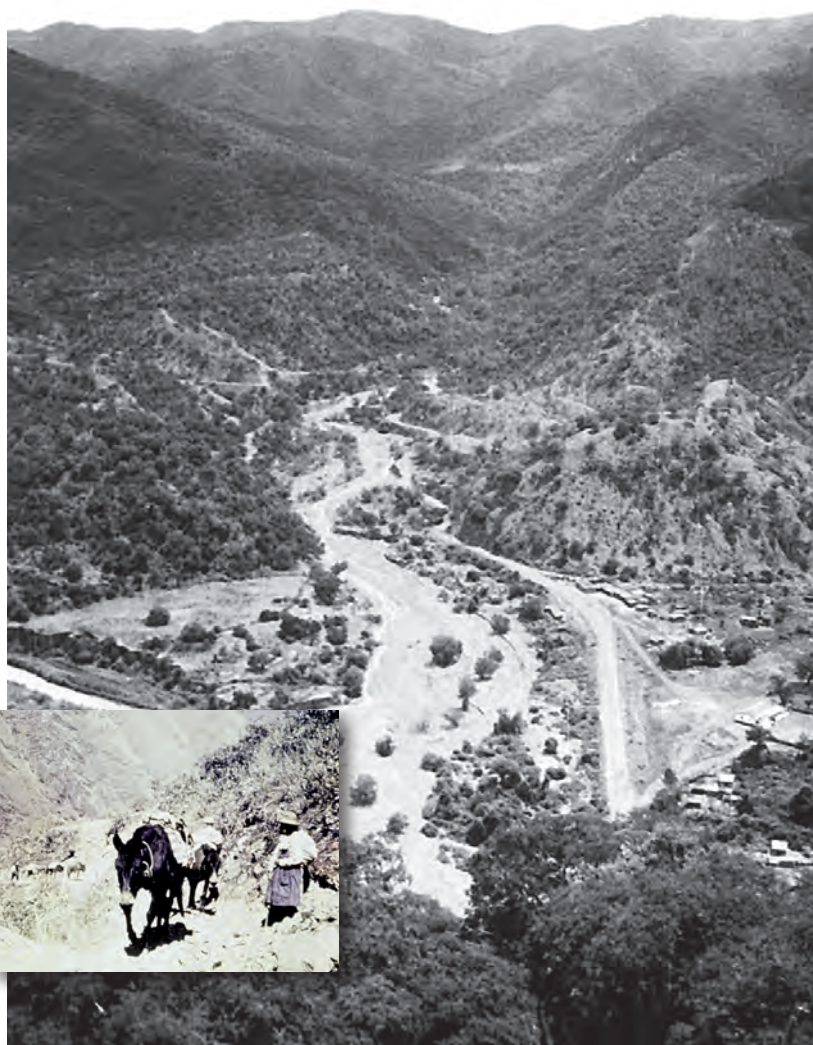
Mario Monje, the Bolivian Communist chief, visited the camp for a strategy meeting on 31 December. An ideological and strategic clash between Guevara and Monje erupted over command and control of the *foco*. The exasperated Monje issued an ultimatum to Che: "The conversation with Monje began with generalities, but he quickly came down to his fundamental premise, stated in three basic conditions: 1) He would resign as party leader but would obtain its neutrality, and cadres would be brought for the struggle; 2) He would be the political and military leader of the struggle as long as it was taking place in Bolivia; 3) He would handle relations with other South American parties, trying to persuade them to support liberation



Mario Monje Molina (left) and Che Guevara (right) conduct a strategy meeting on 31 December 1966. The results would have a negative effect on the foco.

movements."³⁷ Che agreed to the first and third points, but he immediately dismissed Monje's second proposal, replying that: "I was to be the military chief and I was not going to accept ambiguities on this matter. Here the discussion ended stalled in a vicious circle."³⁸ Monje then took his case to the Bolivian guerrillas and issued them an ultimatum: Stay and be purged from the party; or leave with him. "Everyone stayed, and this seemed to be a blow to him," wrote Che.³⁹ Monje hastily left for La Paz the next day, disappointed at the turn of events, but promised to return.⁴⁰ The breach with the Bolivian Communist Party was irrevocable and effective January 1967. It refused to actively support the ELNB.⁴¹ The lack of recruits would haunt Che throughout his entire campaign.

As training, classes, and supplies were stockpiled in January 1967, the guerrilla band experienced further problems. Several became ill because of the new field diet and the hostile environment. The area was plagued with biting pests. "The insects we have seen, up to now, are *yaguasas* [a gnat like insect], gnats, *mariguís* [a yellow winged biting insect], *mosquitoes*, and ticks," wrote Che.⁴² The Cubans gave the Bolivian recruits menial tasks and resentment soon developed. However, Che settled the



Two views of the typical terrain in the guerrilla area of operations.

issues and the group slowly began to coalesce. Suddenly, more trouble arrived at their doorstep.

On 19 January 1967, the local police showed up unexpectedly at the farmhouse. A four-man Bolivian police unit in civilian clothes arrived in an unmarked truck to investigate Ciro Algañaz's claim that the farm was a cocaine factory. The police found nothing suspicious, but confiscated a pistol. The police lieutenant solicited a bribe and then left with an invitation to come to the police station to retrieve the pistol.⁴³ Apparently satisfied, no more police were heard from for almost two months. Despite all of the interest, Che persevered with his plans and continued the train-up program.

The Long March – 1 February – 20 March 1967

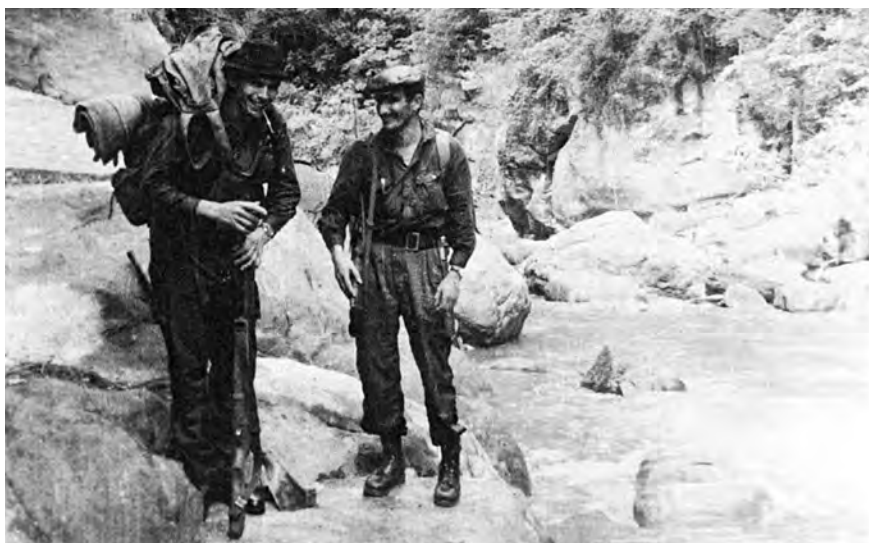
Guevara quickly realized that no one was familiar with the local terrain and the maps provided by Debray were inaccurate. He decided that a conditioning march was needed to accomplish his three goals: "to harden them, teach them how to adapt themselves to the rigors of guerrilla life such as hunger and thirst; to get to know the peasantry, and start winning them over, to establish a base of popular support in the region; and finally, to explore the

terrain in order to familiarize themselves with it and try to broaden their territorial base.⁴⁴

With the two camps complete by the end of January, they could start the march. Che organized the *foco* of 24-men (sixteen Cubans, one Argentine, and only seven Bolivians) into two equal fighting groups. He further organized for the march designating a vanguard, center, and a rear-guard element. *Comandante* Juan Vitalio Acuña Nuñez (Joaquín) was appointed the second-in-command of the *foco*.⁴⁵ Because of their inexperience, the Bolivians were not given leadership positions. Che emphasized that over time their status would change with experience and ultimately they would become the leaders of the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional de Bolivia*.⁴⁶

Their equipment had come from Cuba or been bought in Bolivia. A high-powered short wave radio, packed on a mule was the communications link with Havana via coded messages. Their weapons consisted of a mix of civilian rifles, US-made M-1 rifles and carbines, Bolivian Mausers, and Czech ZB-30 light machineguns. The eclectic mix would match the hodgepodge of Bolivian Army weapons which, according to Che's plan, would be captured once fighting began.⁴⁷

The guerrillas began their planned 25-day conditioning march on 1 February. It lasted a grueling 48 days, a harbinger for the coming campaign.⁴⁸ The group was attacked by insects and bad weather. Four of the Cubans suffered from bouts of malaria, including the doctor. It quickly became apparent that no one was physically ready for the rigors of guerrilla combat, including their leader. The physical stamina of the 38-year-old asthmatic revolutionary had diminished considerably since his days in the Sierra Maestras ten years earlier.⁴⁹ Three weeks into the march Che wrote: "A bad day for me. I was exhausted and made it through will-power alone."⁵⁰ The tough terrain beat down the entire group.



"Miguel," Cuban Manuel Hernández Osorio, a Sierra Maestra veteran (left), and "Inti," Bolivian Guido Peredo Leigue (right), pause after a river crossing during the "Long March." Notice the rocky river valley (or canyon) terrain the guerrillas moved over.

Their maps proved very inaccurate. The rugged terrain exhausted Che and his men. The group regularly became separated and radio communications failed in the canyons. Disaster struck while crossing rain swollen rivers. Two men drowned, and valuable supplies and weapons were lost.⁵¹ The lack of food added to their misery and weakened them further. Scavenging for edible plants and hunting animals for food became a daily routine as they slowly wandered through the area. Everything from small birds, monkeys, sparrow hawks, and finally their own horses made the menu. Rather than unify them, the hardships of the march increased stress and caused dissension and daily arguments between guerrillas.⁵²

In their few brief encounters with locals, Che's *foco* only became more frustrated. The *foco* failed to gain any support from the local population. The few Bolivian guerrillas from the *altiplano* had difficulty understanding the Guaraní dialect. The *campesinos* were curious, but they did not respond to the revolutionary fervor of the strange band of foreigners. Many of the peasants were there because government land reforms had given ten-hectare homesteads (about 25 acres) to 16,000 families.⁵³

After being lost most of the march, the demoralized and exhausted guerrilla force stumbled into the base camp on 20 March. The coded messages from Radio Havana had been tape-recorded to maintain contact with Cuba.⁵⁴ Che recorded a disturbing omen in his diary: "a small plane was circling overhead."⁵⁵ Their "conditioning march" had not gone unnoticed, and reports had reached Bolivian authorities. There would be no time to rest.

The Guerrilla Offensive 23 March – 20 April 1967

The "Long March" was over and the action was about to begin. Reports of a strange group of armed men roaming the countryside had trickled into Camiri, Santa Cruz, and eventually to La Paz. This made the local police and army more suspicious of the Ñancahuazú farm.

While the exhausted guerrillas were recuperating, they received more visitors. Moisés Guevara arrived with several Bolivian recruits; most were unemployed miners looking for a change and a paycheck. However, Pastor "Daniel" Barrera Quintana and Vincent "Orlando" Rocabado Terrazas quickly became disenchanted with the primitive living conditions and camp discipline. Leaving to hunt game on 11 March 1967, they simply deserted. Arrested by the police when they tried to sell their rifles in Camiri, they revealed the Ñancahuazú guerrilla camp location and other details under interrogation. The police went to the Fourth Army Division headquarters in Camiri with their information. At first the division commander, Colonel Humberto Rocha



The Peruvian Communist leader Juan Pablo Chang Navarro (known as "Chino") and Che in camp. The Mao look-a-like had come to Bolivia to gain support for his foco.



Che talks with Bustos, Debray, and several others at Camp #1 at Ñancahuazú.

doubted them, "Guerrillas in Ñancahuazú, with Che Guevara as their leader? Impossible!"⁵⁶ However later that same day an oil worker (Epifano Vargas) arrived to report an encounter with strange speaking men in green clothing carrying automatic weapons and claiming to be geologists. With a second report, Colonel Rocha ordered aerial observation of the Ñancahuazú site (the plane Che had seen) and sent a patrol to verify the information. On 17 March, the patrol reached the farmhouse and discovered various documents, including the diary of Israel Reyes Zayas' (Braulio), various photos, and drawings. The soldiers captured another Bolivian, Saulstio Choque, apparently trying to desert with a mule. The would-be guerrilla and the intelligence items from the farm were brought back to the 4th Division headquarters at Camiri.⁵⁷ Now the government had hard evidence on the guerrillas who were still three days march from the *foco* base.

Unbeknownst to Che, the guerrilla logistics and intelligence networks were compromised and completely broken by the Bolivian intelligence services. Tania had escorted Régis Debray and Ciro Roberto Bustos (Che's "coordinator" for Argentina and a journalist and artist) to the camp. Taking separate routes the trio rendezvoused in Camiri. From there Coco Peredo drove them to the Ñancahuazú camp. However, Tania left her jeep parked on a deserted street in the town. The vehicle, with La Paz license plates, attracted police attention. They searched it and discovered a wealth of information about Che's *foco*, including four of Tania's notebooks listing the entire Bolivian network of urban contacts, friendly Communists outside of Bolivia, and secret money accounts.⁵⁸ Within the week, Communist safe houses throughout Bolivia were raided and many of the contacts arrested. Whether by design or stupidity, Tania, the experienced operative with East German, Soviet, and Cuban agent training, had compromised the operation through her actions.⁵⁹

Greatly disturbed by the Army's discovery of the base camp, Che assessed the situation. After learning that Tania's jeep and its contents had been discovered, Che was infuriated: "Everything appears to indicate that Tania is spotted, whereby two years of good and patient work is lost."⁶⁰ With her cover destroyed he had no choice but to keep Tania with the *foco*. Outside support was effectively cut off, except for radio messages from Cuba. Civilian transistor radios were now their only link to the outside world.

Other reinforcements had come to the camp. Juan Pablo "El Chino" Chang Navarro and two other Peruvians arrived to offer twenty men for training in Bolivia.⁶¹ Che promised to support his Peruvian *foco* with weapons, radio transmitters, and "\$5,000 a month for ten months."⁶² The strategy meeting with El Chino was cut short when "Loro appeared and announced that he had killed a soldier."⁶³ The revolution was beginning ahead of schedule.

With his *foco* base discovered, support denied by the Bolivian Communist Party, and his supply network compromised, Che Guevara chose to take the offensive. Major Hernán Plata led a sixty-man patrol to the base camp on 23 March 1967. En route the guerrillas ambushed the force. They killed seven soldiers, captured fourteen (including four wounded), while the rest fled southward. More importantly they captured 16 Mausers with 2,000 bullets, three 60mm mortars and 64 rounds, three Uzi submachine guns with twenty-four magazines, two "bazookas" (rocket launchers), and a .30 caliber machinegun with two belts of ammunition.⁶⁴ The prisoners were interrogated and endured a political speech. Stripped of their clothes, they were freed a day later.⁶⁵ The guerrillas' baptism by fire was a success.

Instead of immediately abandoning the *foco* base Che had his guerrillas regroup at the camp and joyfully listened to transistor radio broadcasts of their victory. The remaining days of March were spent consolidating the force and

preparing for further operations. The *foco* had reached its maximum strength of 45 combatants, (16 Cubans, 24 Bolivians, 2 Argentines, and the 3 Peruvians).⁶⁶ Not all of the Bolivians on the “Long March” impressed Che. On 25 March he “announced the ‘discharge’ of Paco, Pepe, Chingolo, and Eusebio. They were told that they will not eat if they do not work. I suspended their tobacco ration, and redistributed their personal things and gear among other, needier comrades.”⁶⁷ The “discharges” for these “quitters, slackers, and dregs” was a technicality; the hapless Bolivians had to stay with the *foco* and continue to work. The “visitors,” Tania, Debray, and Bustos, remained with the guerrillas as “non-combatants,” although they were armed. “The famous author of *Revolution in the Revolution*, known to us as Danton [Régis Debray], wanted to demonstrate that he was not simply a theoretician but also a man of action,” said Inti Peredo.⁶⁸

The guerrillas departed Ñancahuazú on 1 April 1967 and proceeded to raise havoc with the Bolivian army. During April as the group moved, it twice encountered army patrols southwest of Ñancahuazú between El Meson and Muyupampa. On 10 April near Iripiti (only 12 miles north of the original camp) the *foco* conducted two ambushes on the same day, killing eight, wounding eight, and taking 28 prisoners. They captured 21 M-1 Garand rifles, 12 M-1 carbines, 9 Mausers, 4 M-3 submachineguns, another mortar, and one Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR). They now had more weapons than they needed.⁶⁹ A Cuban, Jesús Suárez Gayol (“Rubio”), one of Che’s best officers, was killed, but the *foco* had successfully foiled the Bolivian army.⁷⁰

The guerrilla force then turned south. En route to Muyupampa, Che divided his small force. On 17 April north of that town (roughly 30 kilometers,) he detached the rearguard under the command of “Joaquín” (Juan Vitalio Acuña Nuñez). Inti Peredo noted, “We knew that Joaquín’s group did not have combat strength, with 4 “rejects,” 3 ailing comrades receiving care [Tania, Moisés Guevara, and a third guerrilla], and only 10 others who had to carry the load of the entire operations.” (Note: there is doubt concerning the numbers in Joaquín’s rearguard – numbers vary from ten to seventeen).⁷¹ Staying at the village of Bella Vista for two or three days, the rearguard was to rest and wait for the return of Che’s vanguard from the south.

As the vanguard moved through the countryside, the guerrilla’s presence became well known to the locals. Helped by some curious children, George Andrew Roth, an Anglo-Chilean freelance journalist, wandered into the guerrilla bivouac on 19 April.⁷² Debray and Bustos quickly concocted a plan to leave the group with Roth. Debray was anxious to leave after experiencing the realities of revolutionary life. His three-week indoctrination to guerrilla field operations convinced Debray that his best contribution was writing theory. After they left, Che wrote: “The Frenchman stated too vehemently how useful he could be on the outside.”⁷³ As the three set out for Muyupampa, the rest of the vanguard moved away. Little did Che know how significant the events surrounding 20 March would become to the *foco*.



The *foco* left its camp on 1 April first heading north and then turning south toward Muyupampa. The decisions of the first month, shown above, would have disastrous consequences. Map by D. Telles.

Realizing the significance of the guerrilla movement, President Rene Barrientos had requested U.S. assistance to combat the insurgency. The advanced element of a mobile training team was already in La Paz coordinating with the government. The Bolivian army designated a large area surrounding the Ñancahuazú as “the Red Zone” and sent additional army units to find the guerrillas. The growing insurgent threat prompted action from U.S. Southern Command and the Panama Canal Zone based 8th Special Forces Group. ▲

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- 45 **Comandante Juan Vitalio Acuña Nuñez (Joaquín) was also a member of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party, had operated a guerrilla school in Matanzas, Cuba, and served nine months in Vietnam;** James, *Che Guevara*, 217.
- 46 James, *Che Guevara*, 222-227.
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- 49 James, *Che Guevara*, 227.
- 50 James, *Diaries*, 116; Waters, *The Bolivian Diary of Ernesto Che Guevara*, 132.
- 51 Waters, *The Bolivian Diary of Ernesto Che Guevara*, 146-147.
- 52 Weil, *Area Handbook*, 349.
- 53 James, *Che Guevara*, 275; Ernesto Guevara (with an introduction and case studies by Brian Lovemen and Thomas M. Davies, Jr.), *Che Guevara on Guerrilla Warfare* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 343; **Ten hectares is about 25 acres.**
- 54 James, *Che Guevara*, 224-233.
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- 58 James, *Che Guevara*, 238; Anderson, *Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life*, 713.
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- 67 James, *Diaries*, 131; **The four Bolivians "discharged" by Che were: Paco (José Castillo Chávez), Pepe (Julio Velasco Montana), Chingolo (Hugo Choque Silva), and Eusebio (Eusebio Tapia Aruni).**
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“Welcome to Bolivia, MTT-BL 404-67X”

by Charles H. Briscoe



Left to right – SGT Byron R. Sigg, CPT Barry McCaffrey, aide to MG William DePuy, Special Assistant to the Secretary of Defense for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities (SACSA), and SFC Daniel V. Chapa during the general's visit to La Esperanza, 7-9 August 1967.

Three weeks after being alerted for the Bolivia mission, the 8th SFG MTT's main body flew from Howard AFB, Panama on 29 April 1967 to organize, equip, and train an elite Ranger Battalion. Two C-130 Hercules cargo aircraft carried fourteen SF officers and sergeants, personal and unit equipment, training materials, and supplementary foods to support a deployment for up to 179 days, the maximum allowable time for a temporary duty (TDY) assignment. The mission was to train and prepare a special infantry element to defeat a foreign-led insurgency in remote southeast Bolivia. It was not an unusual assignment. U.S. Army Special Forces teams had been serving as "force multipliers" training foreign troops to counter insurgency throughout the region and in Southeast Asia since the early 1960s. The SF soldiers had to learn all they could about the host country, its armed forces and police, and the guerrillas. Since these small mobile training teams (MTTs) were the "tip of spear" of U.S. national strategy, they had to have solid support to accomplish their missions. With SF teams deployed throughout Latin America, the 8th SFG operations center (OPCEN) maintained a 24-hour communications watch. The sensitivity of the Bolivia mission required communications personnel with the highest security clearances. The 8th SAF (Special Action Force, Latin America) had 401st ASA (Army Security Agency) Detachment radio operators in the OPCEN when MTT-BL 404-67X launched.¹

"It was a long non-stop flight, but we landed on the dirt airstrip at Santa Cruz, unloaded everything and put it aboard the waiting 8th Division [Bolivian] trucks, and headed north to La Esperanza. It took more than the usual

Dorys Roca and family in La Esperanza.



MAJ Ralph "Pappy" Shelton talks with SFC Ethyl Duffield (left) and MSG Oliverio Gomez (right) at La Esperanza.

hour and a half to drive there, but we finished unloading shortly before sunset. Talk about a long day, that was one," said MAJ Ralph "Pappy" Shelton.² "As we taxied to the small terminal, I spotted MSG Milliard and SFC Rivera Colon waiting for us. They were wearing their green berets; 'So much for a low profile!' The major dealt with this by having all of us put on our berets. Supposedly, it was important that we make a grand entrance," said SGT Graham. "So we put on our berets. But after that, we wore them only on special occasions: when we introduced ourselves to the new battalion, when visitors came, and during ceremonies."³ The following is a description of La Esperanza by Dorys Roca, who lived there in 1967:

"La Esperanza had somewhere between a hundred and two hundred people living there when the Americans and the Bolivian Rangers came to town in 1967. Only a few *indios* [Indians] lived in the village. Most men worked out of town and came home on weekends to be with their families. There were a lot of people here in the early 1960s before the sugar mill went out of business. Still, we had no electricity and got our water from the well in the plaza where the kiosks were," said Dorys Roca, who later married SF Sergeant Alvin Graham. "Our house had three rooms filled with beds for the fourteen

Departing Santa Cruz airport with the trucks crammed with equipment and supplies. The two C-130s are in the background.





The Santa Cruz bus stop by Hugo's kiosk in La Esperanza.

of us. Because we had no heat, we slept huddled together. The cooking was done in an outside adjacent shed. Every family had an outhouse. We used a nearby lake to wash and do laundry. Once or twice a year we rode the morning or afternoon bus or hopped a truck to Santa Cruz to buy shoes and clothes. There was a church, but the priest was responsible for several villages. You would call him a 'circuit rider,' I guess. But, every Christmas and All Saints Day everyone walked in a procession around the town. School was year round. No one had a car or truck; one either rode a horse or walked. Children were delivered by a midwife. Compared to the States, living conditions were primitive, but daily life, though simple, was pleasant."⁴

Some of the SF soldiers on their first MTT were quite surprised. "I was amazed that the sugar mill still had buildings with roofs. We brought tents expecting nothing. The original power lines [220/240 volts DC (direct current)] were still there so we could hook up our generator and have lights in our houses. I had seen no telephone poles nor power lines alongside the road to La Esperanza, so that was a nice



SSGs James Hapka (left) and Jerald Peterson cooking over a stove in the team quarters.



The sugar plantation had a well and storage cistern for water.

surprise," remarked SGT Graham. "When we drove into town, the local people were smiling and seemed happy."⁵ SSG Hapka's first impression of the mill town was: "Lord have mercy! Other than some houses, there was no electricity, no running water, and only rudimentary sanitation."⁶ CPT Edmond L. Fricke, the MTT deputy and operations officer, described La Esperanza as "a town with 15 or 20 families, with a few dirt streets over which cowhands occasionally drove thundering herds of cattle that covered the houses in huge clouds of dust. It seemed to have been made for a Western movie. Close your eyes," said Fricke, "and think about *Guns smoke* [a popular 1960s television Western]."⁷ It did not really matter because the mission eliminated thoughts of a social life anyway.

After the unloading was done and MAJ Shelton had assigned everyone to a building for sleeping, MSG Milliard and SFC Rivera Colon briefed everyone on the latest guerrilla activity south of Santa Cruz and then gave the team a tour of the area. "The only Bolivian troops there were a small security force. We took the team around and pointed out the areas available for training and showed them where the marksmanship ranges were going to be built by Harry Singh's crew," said MSG Milliard.⁸ "On the tour we pointed out where the Frenchman, Régis Debray, was being held prisoner. It was a one-story, dilapidated building that looked like an old horse stable. The guard outside was armed with a 7.62 mm Mauser. The Bolivians moved Debray out the next day," said SSG Thompson.⁹ "By the time we finished, the biting bugs were out in force. No one had to be reminded to set up his mosquito net. While we had a meal of C-rations, MSG Gomez announced the night's guard detail, and we went to bed," said Milliard.



Plantation building where Frenchman Régis Debray (inset) was temporarily held before his trial in Santa Cruz.

"The first Rangers began arriving in small increments. And when they did, they came in several truckloads at a time."¹⁰ In the meantime, the SF soldiers established camp and got ready for their initial classes.

Since American soldiers were most vulnerable in a foreign country while they were getting settled, the SF leaders had to build rapport with the community authorities and develop an informal early warning system to protect themselves against guerrilla threats. While the rest of the team were setting up communications, taking care of field sanitation, and preparing camp the next day, MSG Milliard introduced MAJ Shelton, CPT Fricke, and CPT Margarito Cruz to the local dignitaries and shopkeepers of La Esperanza. Though the mayor (*alcalde*) Erwin Bravo, a small businessman, was the ranking person, the school teacher, Jorgé, was the most respected personality. The Catholic priest only came by occasionally.¹¹

The Americans had to explain the following: why they were there; what their mission was in La Esperanza; how long they'd be there; and what kind of training was to be conducted. They emphasized their concern for the safety of the townspeople; the medical capabilities that SF brought; and that MAJ Shelton was in charge and responsible for his soldiers. He was the man to see about any problems. They needed to hire a cook and helper, arrange to have laundry done, haircuts, and buy small sundries as a start. "Winning the hearts and minds' of the community was the first step towards accomplishing the mission and insuring our survival. Afterwards, we were given a 'tour' of the village that included introductions to some of the folks and, not surprisingly, ended at the old schoolhouse," said MSG Milliard.¹²

"That quickly established the civic action project in

MAJ Ralph "Pappy" Shelton used his guitar to build rapport with the people of La Esperanza.



my mind because the existing school accommodated 240 children of all ages who lived in and around the village. Jorgé and his wife provided what little grade school education the local population received. The people didn't have much, but they were proud of their little settlement and rightfully so," said MAJ Shelton.¹³

"I spent most of that first week, just 'hanging out' as they say today, being friendly, to make the locals comfortable with me, and showing that we posed no danger. It's amazing how much information you can get by just talking with people. By the end of the week, I carried my Gibson guitar along. I can't play that well, but the men could. It seems like they learned at birth. That ole guitar did the trick," chuckled Shelton. "The truth is that was our primary intelligence collection method until we could train some Bolivian Rangers. Then, it became secondary to the intelligence 'agents' trained by CPT Cruz and MSG Milliard. But it had become a routine, so I kept it up."¹⁴

"MAJ Shelton wanted to promote good relations with the locals by giving them as much business as possible. Hugo and his wife ran the nearby kiosk (*kiosko*) selling grain alcohol, beer, sodas, and sandwiches. He became our barber and shoe repairman and also pulled teeth for the people. Local women did the cooking, laundry, and cleaned our quarters," said SFC Carpenter.¹⁵ The SF established good communications with the locals but radio "commo" with Panama and La Paz proved much more difficult.

The MTT's primary radio was supposed to be the SF standard AN/GRC-109. SFC Roger L. Kluckman, the SF communications supervisor, tried a variety of techniques. He installed the AT-292 antenna on the top of the tallest building, tried a field expedient directional antenna, and asked the MILGP in La Paz to relay traffic to Panama with little success. The "back up" radio, a commercial Collins KWM2A single sideband CW (Morse Code) and voice radio with its 1,000 watt linear transceiver, became the primary. Good CW and voice "commo" were established with Fort Gulick by 5 May 1967 after adjusting report times. The best link to La Paz was using the Collins.¹⁶

"We used the AN/GRC-109 to connect the Ranger Battalion to 8th Division in Santa Cruz. Situation reports (SITREPs) from 8th Division kept us informed about the

Replacement of the old school would be the major civic action project for MTT-BL 404-67X.





Left to right, SFC Richard A. Kimmich, SSG William W. Burkett, and SFC William R. Bush relaxing at the kiosk.



MSG Oliverio Gomez talks with some of the La Esperanza residents.

guerrilla contacts. A sergeant in the MILGP who was a Ham radio enthusiast (Call Sign: CP1DS) arranged to get the MTT a Bolivian license, 'Call Sign: CP6HY.' The 'CP' stood for Bolivia. Then we 'hammed' with him nightly. My parents became so used to my nightly MARS radio-telephone call through W1AZP, a Sikorsky Helicopter employee living in Stratford, Connecticut, that my Dad got upset when I didn't call," laughed SSG Wendell Thompson.¹⁷ "Late at night, SFC (William R.) Bush, who replaced SFC Kluckman when his wife learned that she was having twins, talked with the radiomen on the SS *Queen Mary* as it sailed down the east coast of South America, through the Straits of Magellan and up the west coast of South America to Long Beach, California, where it was to become a tourist attraction. Since I spoke Russian, Sergeant Bush would dial in Moscow so that I could listen to the Communist news," remembered MSG Oliverio

Gomez, the team sergeant.¹⁸ By then, the Bolivians were settled in the sugar mill warehouse, and it was time to start training.

"The Ranger Battalion had been organized much like U.S. Army infantry battalions in WWII. Since it had a very small headquarters, company officers were assigned additional staff duties. There was a small radio section and a reconnaissance platoon at battalion level. The rifle companies had four platoons (called *secciones*): three rifle platoons and a weapons platoon equipped with French 82 mm mortars. There were four nine-man squads in a rifle platoon: three rifle squads carried predominantly 7.62mm Czechoslovakian-made Mauser rifles; the weapons squad had two Czechoslovakian (BRNO) 7.92 ZB-30 light machineguns (predecessor to the famous British Bren gun of WWII). The other men in the weapons squad, carrying Mausers, served as assistant gunners

and ammunition bearers. Squad leaders, selected by their peers, wore red epaulets (tabs) on the shoulders of their uniform shirt. The Ranger companies operated with about 140 personnel," said SFC Chapa.¹⁹

"It was better than Christmas in La Esperanza when the 'new' WWII and Korean War-vintage weapons arrived from Panama," said MAJ Shelton.²⁰ "Initially, we didn't get enough .30 cal M-1 Garands and .30

cal BARs (Browning Automatic Rifles) to equip all rifle platoons, so one rifle platoon per company carried their old Mausers and magazine-fed ZB-30s light machineguns. The new .30 cal M-1919A6 light machineguns and 3.5 inch rocket launchers went to the weapons squads in each rifle company," related SFC Chapa.²¹ But the Bolivians were a long way from firing weapons in early May 1967. ♣

1LT Harvey W. Wallender (left) replaced CPT Margarito Cruz in October 1967. Here SFC Daniel Chapa and he talk with the "agents."



CPT Margarito Cruz, MTT S2 Officer



CPT James Trimble, MTT S1/S4 Officer

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Endnotes

- 1 William G. Mullins, Sr. interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 20 May 2008, Fort Bragg, NC, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited as Mullins interview and date.
- 2 Ralph W. Shelton, telephone interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 10 October 2008, Sweetwater, TN, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited as Shelton interview with date.
- 3 Alvin E. Graham, telephone interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 16 October 2008, Phoenix, AZ, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited as Graham interview with date.
- 4 Dorys Graham Roca, telephone interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 22 October 2008, Phoenix, AZ, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC. *Dorys Roca was fifteen years old when the Americans came to La Esperanza. She had only been shopping in Santa Cruz and lived away from home for several months while tending a sick relative in Montero. She felt lucky to get a job cleaning the quarters and doing the laundry of the Americans. "It was kind of scary with the Americans there and several hundred Bolivian soldiers wandering around our village on the weekends, though we did have a policeman and a jail," said Dorys Graham Roca. Mrs. Graham Roca became a U.S. citizen in Phoenix, AZ, on 21 September 1971. She has never returned home.*
- 5 Graham interview, 16 October 2008.
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- 7 CPT Edmond L. Fricke quote from Henry Butterfield Ryan. *The Fall of Che Guevara: A Story of Soldiers, Spies, and Diplomats* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1998), 91.
- 8 Roland J. Milliard, telephone interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 20 October 2008, Dracut, MA, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited as Milliard interview with date.
- 9 Wendell P. Thompson, telephone interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 7 January 2008, Pickerington, OH, hereafter cited as Thompson interview with date and Jerald L. Peterson interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 6 April 2007, Fort Bragg, NC, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited as Peterson interview and date. *Régis Debray had been captured on 20 April 2007 with Ciro Roberto Bustos, an Argentine revolutionary and artist, and George Andrew Roth, a free-lance English-Chilean photographer/writer, shortly after they left Che Guevara's camp. Ryan. The Fall of Che Guevara, 72.*
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- 11 Milliard interview, 15 October 2008.
- 12 Milliard interview, 15 October 2008.
- 13 Shelton interview, 13 April 2007 and MTT-BL 404-67X, 8th Special Forces Group (Airborne), 1st Special Forces, Special Action Force, Fort Gulick, Canal Zone, Situation Report (SITREP) SUBJECT: Report of Mobile Training Team to Bolivia (RCS CSGPO-125) dated 29 May 1967, hereafter cited as 8th SFG MTT-BL 404-67X SITREP with date.
- 14 Shelton interview, 13 April 2007 and 8th SFG MTT-BL 404-67X SITREP dated 29 May 1967.
- 15 Daniel V. Chapa, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 18 April 2007, Fort Bragg, NC, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited as Chapa interview with date and Harold T. Carpenter, telephone interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 18 November 2008, Las Vegas, NV, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited as Carpenter interview with date.
- 16 8th SFG MTT-BL 404-67X SITREP dated 29 May 1967.
- 17 Thompson interview, 7 January 2008 and Carpenter interview, 6 November 2008.
- 18 Oliverio Gomez, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 14 November 2008, Pacific Grove, CA, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited as Gomez interview with date and Graham interview, 21 October 2008.
- 19 Daniel V. Chapa and Jerald L. Peterson, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 11 April 2007, Fort Bragg, NC, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited as Chapa and Peterson interview with date.
- 20 Shelton interview, 12 April 2007.
- 21 Chapa and Peterson interview, 11 April 2007.



SSG William W. Burkett demonstrating how to hold the 3.5-inch AT rocket launcher.

SSG Wendell Thompson checks the weapon positioning of a left-handed Bolivian Ranger firing a 7.62 Mauser.





Field Sanitation, Practicing Medicine, and Civic Action in Bolivia

by Charles H. Briscoe

*SFC Roland J. Milliard passes out
candy during a MEDCAP*

The Special Forces medic is the best-trained combat emergency medical practitioner in the American military. It takes two years of schooling and practical experience to become fully qualified, and annual re-certifications are mandatory. These soldiers have the skills of physicians' assistants and routinely perform minor surgery in combat and remote areas. They are the prime enablers and force multipliers who "win the hearts and minds" of the populace as the SF ODA (Operational Detachment Alpha) performs its missions. They are especially important during foreign internal defense (FID) assignments with counterinsurgency (COIN) training. The two medics on the mobile training team (MTT) mission to Bolivia in 1967 fulfilled their role with distinction.

The work for the two Special Forces medics on MTT-BL 404-67X began with the arrival of the Bolivian conscripts in the early days of May 1967. The smell and accumulating filth around the warehouse where the soldiers were billeted prompted immediate action. The peasant soldiers had to be taught field sanitation immediately and the critical necessity for it became a top priority enforced by the Bolivian junior officers and sergeants. If not, disease would threaten the team's ability to organize, field, and train a Ranger force. Classes in health, field sanitation, and personal hygiene were immediately given. Construction of several latrines 50-100 meters away from sleeping areas followed.

"It was hard to impress upon the Bolivian troops that field sanitation was important. They simply did not know any better. The majority were *indios* from the hinterlands whose toilet since birth had been anywhere outdoors.



The slit trench latrine built by the SF medics was treated like a shrine by the Bolivians and never used.



The large anaconda was added to the Bolivian "stew" pot.



SFC Daniel V. Chapa

DOB: 22 August 1933
POB: Alamo, TX
HS: GED
Native Speaker

Army: Joined 1953, Ft Campbell, KY, BCT 11th Airborne Div, Abn School, Ft Benning, GA; Japan, E Co, 2/187th ABRCT; 1956, SSG (E-5) Gyro to Ft Bragg, G Co, 505th Inf, J/M School Instr; 1959, Germany, 3rd Inf Division, 3rd ID AMU; 1961, Distinguished Marksman; 1962, Ft Bragg, C Co, 2/325 Inf, 82nd Abn Div; 1965, SSG (E-6), 82nd Abn Div, Dom Rep, Joined SF; 1966, SFC, B Co, 8th SFG, Panama, 8th SFG Abn School-GT Abn Bn cadre course.¹

Water was for drinking and cooking. Bathing was optional based on available water sources. The slit trench latrine 'model' that we built and demonstrated how to use properly became almost a shrine. They never used it, and even those they constructed were rarely used," said SSG James Hapka, a team medic.¹ "The conscripts continued to head for the bushes. We finally convinced them to relieve themselves at least twenty meters behind their billets. Because toilet paper was foreign to most of them, there weren't any 'warning flags.' You really had to keep your eyes open," said SFC Dan Chapa. "Living with them was not an option."²

The Special Forces maintained a separate camp with their own latrine and washing area. If they became sick their mission would be compromised. "SFC [Ethyl W.] Duffield and I dug most of our latrines. When you didn't follow MSG [Oliverio] Gomez's instructions exactly, the team sergeant used 'hole digging' to enforce discipline. He'd be up waiting for 'Duff' and me when we came back late from a ration run to Santa Cruz. While we were digging at night, he'd inspect our progress with his Coleman lantern. If it wasn't shoulder high yet, he'd say, 'Keep digging,' and walk off," chuckled SFC Chapa. "It was a way to keep us in line, and, because it was imposed at night, the Bolivians



SSG James Hapka treats a Bolivian soldier with a glandular infection in his armpit.



never knew. It kept the guys on the team laughing.”³ One other medical responsibility associated with sanitation was inspection of the Bolivian “mess.”

“It was actually an outdoor fireplace where local women occasionally cooked. Each morning the soldiers were given a piece of bread and a cup of sweet black coffee. Lunch in the field was another piece of bread that was carried in a pocket. Dinner was served from the half of a 55-gallon drum in which a “stew” of questionable ingredients simmered,” said SSG Peterson. “After MAJ Shelton tasted the concoction, we were told not to eat there.”⁴ “One day, out of curiosity, I asked the ‘cook’ what was in the caldron,” recalled SFC Chapa. “He gave me a dirty look and said, ‘I’m doing what I’m told.’ I responded, ‘But, you’re the cook.’ He replied, ‘I’m not really a cook. I’m just doing a job.’ I decided that there was no reason to pursue it.”⁵ After their collective experiences at the Bolivian “mess,” SSGs Peterson and Hapka concentrated on practicing medicine since only a few conscripts had ever been treated by a doctor.

SSGs James Hapka (left) and Jerald L. Peterson (center) gave these Bolivian soldiers their first physical exams.

Assessing the general health of the Bolivian soldiers by conducting rudimentary physical examinations familiarized the SF medics with several common health problems. “Most of the conscripts were illiterate, so reading an eye chart would have been futile. Dental hygiene was atrocious; care was nonexistent. Though very hardened by a tough rural life, they had a lot of skin diseases and infections, most attributable to poor personal hygiene. Since these soldiers had only grown up with a single shirt, a pair of trousers, some sandals, and a poncho, it seemed quite normal to just have one uniform,” related SSG Hapka. “That did not promote good hygiene.”⁶

“The training area where we did tactical field exercises had a lot of bull thorn trees that the soldiers used for cover and concealment. Those thorns were about an inch and half long and caused nasty scratches. Personal hygiene was so poor that they became infected very quickly. To make matters worse, the bull thorn trees had a symbiotic relationship with red ants. The branches being pushed aside by the first man usually triggered red ant ambushes on all those following the same route,” remembered SSG Peterson. “However, the worst infections were caused by flies or boring insects (*venchugas*) that attacked the raw gashes. They deposited eggs inside creating boils. These had to be lanced, scrubbed out with stiff, soapy brushes, antiseptic applied, and then penicillin given to the hapless victims. Sometimes, this had to be repeated several times.”⁷





After proper treatment of the infection on his face this Ranger served as the senior Bolivian medic in the SF aid station.



SSG Jerald L. Peterson attending one of the casualties of the mortar accident.

"Our best medic was one of these victims. His face looked like someone had thrown acid on him. It was something straight out of a horror movie. We loaded him up with penicillin and twice a day scrubbed his face clean for almost two weeks before he started healing up properly. It turned out that he was really a handsome guy. We decided to use him in the dispensary as the senior Bolivian medic. He became a real asset," said SSG Peterson. "Hygiene precautions were taken by the Americans, but the place was full of 'biting critters.'" ⁸

"MSG Gomez warned us about the *venchugas*, so we tucked the mosquito nets under our air mattresses," said SFC Chapa. ⁹ Since the SF soldiers spent most of their time training Bolivian troops in the field, they encountered a variety of venomous scorpions and snakes on the ground and flying insects, spiders, and tree vipers in the wooded areas. Only one American SF soldier, SFC Chapa, suffered a near fatal injury in Bolivia. ¹⁰

"C Company was getting ready to conduct a night attack. I remember walking under a tree when something hit my forehead. The next thing that I felt was a hot tingling spreading down my arms and legs and general weakness. I was having a hard time standing up," recalled SFC Chapa. ¹¹

"MAJ Shelton got Chapa into the carryall provided by the MILGP and took him back to camp. By then, Chapa was semi-conscious when we manhandled him into the aid station. Jim Hapka and I suspected a snake bite because tree vipers were common. We cut off his clothes and examined him all over, but we couldn't find fang marks anywhere. He was mumbling that his skin was on fire and tingling and that he felt very weak. All that we could see abnormal was a large lump on his forehead. Because Chapa's arms and legs were swelling, Jim began treating him for anaphylactic shock, injecting cortisone between his fingers and toes," said Peterson. ¹²

"Since the nearest doctor was in Santa Cruz, almost two hours away, Hapka radioed Fort Gulick to call in the Group Surgeon for an emergency consult. We took shifts applying wet, cool compresses while we waited for the

callback. When the surgeon in Panama could suggest no better treatment, we continued with compresses and cortisone shots. The next morning Chapa was no better, but no worse either," continued Peterson. ¹³

"By then word of his condition had spread among the villagers and a local healer (*bruja*) recommended applying a piece of raw meat to the lump on his forehead to draw out the poison. Since he was unconscious, we didn't think that would hurt anything. So, we bandaged a slab of beef onto his forehead. Thirty-six hours later, when Chapa came to, we warned him not to touch his head or look in the mirror. When he dozed off, I removed the meat slab from his head. We didn't want Chapa to think that the SF medics had used voodoo medicine to cure him. That was our little secret," said SSG Peterson, "but it was pretty scary there for awhile." ¹⁴ "I was checked out by CPT Quiñones, the group surgeon, when he visited La Esperanza in November and when we returned to Fort Gulick in December," said SFC Chapa. "I had no after effects, but the guys tried to play tricks on me saying that there was wasp behind my head." ¹⁵

In addition to treating their own and the Bolivian soldiers, the two medics had handled forty night emergency medical calls in the community by mid-May. They started sick call for the community every Saturday morning beginning on 15 May. Night emergency visits continued. By the end of December 1967, the two had responded to 124 night calls for medical assistance. They treated 410 men, 589 women, and 1,375 children in La Esperanza alone. ¹⁶ Hapka and Peterson were expected to train the field medics for the battalion.

"The medic training, while oriented around U.S. Army basic medic [today's 68W MOS (military occupational specialty)] skills, emphasized treatment for gunshot and explosive injuries and broken bones normally associated with them. They needed to have emergency medical skills to perform immediate first aid. Today, they're called

'Combat Lifesaver' skills. We taught shock symptoms, wound cleansing, proper bandaging, when, how, and where to apply a tourniquet, starting IVs (intravenous fluids), splinting broken bones, and sucking chest wound treatment. The medics were shown how to make field expedient stretchers, splints, and bandages from clothing," said SSG Hapka. "Pete (SSG Jerald Peterson) and I built small medical aid bags for each of the field medics and resupplied as necessary. Emergency medical evacuation was a truck to the civilian hospital in Santa Cruz."¹⁷ Along with their medical training Hapka and Peterson presented weapons classes.

"SSG Hapka and I taught the hand grenade to the battalion *en masse*. Throwing is a part of many American sports, but it was not a natural skill for most Bolivian peasants. We showed them first how to throw rocks accurately. That skill mastered, we started using practice hand grenades. When we took them to the range, they enjoyed watching the explosions so much that we had to constantly remind them to drop down into the prone after tossing the grenade to avoid fragments. It took a few cuts and nicks before they got the message. Even though we alternated shouting the commands and demonstrations, we were both hoarse afterwards. All we had was a small, conical megaphone. The *altiplano* conscripts spoke Quechua and Aymara primarily, but understood some rudimentary Spanish. While classes often evolved into 'monkey see, monkey do,' learning, the soldiers were always enthusiastic and eager to learn," said SSG Peterson.¹⁸ "During the bayonet fighting, Bolivian officers were interspersed in the formation because they used weapons with unsheathed bayonets," said SFC Chapa.¹⁹ In addition to the compass, map reading, hand grenade, bayonet fighting, and combat medic classes, medical emergencies, sick call, and medical coverage on the ranges, the SF medics dealt with training accidents.

Surprisingly, there were only three fatal accidents during the six month mission. No Americans were injured in these. The first happened on 28 July after a

lieutenant ordered a soldier to clean his pistol without clearing it beforehand. The accidental discharge occurred in the crowded troop billets area. Fortunately, no one else was hurt. The Bolivian soldier died enroute to Santa Cruz.²⁰ The most serious training accident was on Sunday, 11 August.

"This incident involved the smooth bore French 82 mm mortars. A Bolivian sergeant (*sub-official*), on his own initiative, decided to take his squad out for additional training one Sunday afternoon. No one in the Bolivian chain of command nor any of the Americans were notified. How he got the ammunition was unknown. The sergeant had his squad set up the French mortar for a fire mission. Then, he took several men about a hundred meters in front of the position along the gun-target line to show them how to call for fire. The first round fell short, killing one (the sergeant) and seriously wounding several others. The explosion caught us by surprise. It was caused by a combination of errors: wrong mortar elevation; firing into the wind without compensation; and ammunition from old stocks. SSG Hapka did an emergency triage and started first aid, got IVs flowing, and stabilized them as best he could. Then, the dead man and the two most seriously injured were loaded aboard a truck. SFC Kimmich accompanied them to the province hospital in Santa Cruz. The primitive, early 1900s-vintage, medical facility did have a doctor on duty. One of the wounded died in the hospital," remembered SSG Peterson.²¹

The third accident occurred during refresher tactical training provided to nine infantry companies after the Ranger Battalion mission. "We were teaching the Bolivian soldiers how to determine where a shot came from and its approximate distance away. It's commonly called the 'crack-thump' method [the crack of the rifle shot provides direction while distance from the shooter to the target is determined by the amount of time elapsed before the thump of the bullet is heard]. I'm convinced that the shooter selected by the Bolivian officers did not understand exactly what he was supposed to do nor did he

Bolivian Rangers conducted rifle bayonet fighting drills with unsheathed bayonets.





(Left) SGT Byron R. Sigg, a radioman, helps SSG Hapka with an ear exam.



(Right) Bolivian Ranger medics practice splinting a broken leg.

(Above) Since one SF medic had to be present in camp on radio standby while marksmanship, live fire exercises, and field training were being conducted, SFC Robert Owens (who replaced SSG Jerald Peterson 3 October 1967) and SSG James Hapka rotated the MEDCAP missions. Here Hapka explains to a mother what must be done to cure her daughter's problem.

factor in the bullet's trajectory when he supposedly aimed over the heads of the infantry soldiers sitting in makeshift bleachers. He was told to make it realistic and did. When the soldiers did hear the sound of the thump, half turned right and the other half, less one man, turned left. The man who didn't turn, tumbled forward, shot in the chest. He died enroute to Santa Cruz," remembered SFC Tom Carpenter, a light weapons sergeant on the MTT.²² These were the worst moments for the medics. The best were during the MEDCAPs (medical capability) in nearby villages and towns.

MAJ Shelton expanded his civic action efforts by supporting the requests from several Peace Corps volunteers for MEDCAP visits to their towns. In 1967, there were more than 220 volunteers serving throughout the country.²³ When the visiting regional director introduced himself to the Shelton during a MEDCAP, he emphasized the "PEACE" part. The nonplussed, good humored SF major from Mississippi calmly responded, "Pleased to meet you. I'm Major Ralph Shelton from the 'WAR' corps. I'm glad that my medics can help out by treating these folks, seeing how most couldn't afford to see a doctor in Santa Cruz."²⁴ The volunteers who lived and taught English and farming techniques in the small villages appreciated the military medics.

"We did three MEDCAPs in Las Cruces and three in Los Chacos at the invitation of the Peace Corps volunteers. We treated kids primarily. There were very few old folks. Everyone seemed to have the same skin diseases and infections that plagued the Rangers for basically the same reasons: poor personal hygiene and contaminated water. I treated one sick dog and a horse with the biggest

syringe and needle that I had, a 20 cc syringe with an 18 gauge needle, to inject 20 million units of penicillin into that old nag. While we brought a field dental set, I don't recall doing any extractions. Hugo, the barber and kiosk owner in La Esperanza, did some 'dentistry' on the side. He gave his 'patients' a few hits of *aguardiente* (highly potent grain alcohol distilled from sugar cane juice) and took several belts before going to work," chuckled SSG Hapka. "We had no desire to compete with him."²⁵ The American medics treated more than 2,500 civilians and expended \$10,000 dollars in medicine, bandages, and medical supplies.²⁶ MAJ Shelton was so well regarded by the Indian conscripts that they asked him to help the indigenous squatters on the plantation.

A few soldiers brought the leaders of the large Indian "squatter" community to MAJ Shelton when they were about to be evicted. The New York bank holding the lien on the sugar facility wanted to sell the land to a group of Japanese and Okinawan farmers living west of Santa Cruz. "MSG Gomez and I made a trip to visit their community and meet the leaders. We invited them to La Esperanza to talk with the spokesmen for the Quechua-speaking squatters. The fat, bald-headed bank representative accompanied them. After touring the plantation and realizing what their land purchase would do to the poor folks that had built homes on the property, the Japanese and Okinawans empathized with their situation. They recalled that it hadn't been that many years since they had come virtually penniless to Bolivia. The deal collapsed. Gomez and I became heroes in the eyes of those squatters. We both felt really good about how that turned out" said the tenant farmer's son from Mississippi.²⁷



A group of Bolivian Ranger musicians joined MAJ Pappy Shelton's quartet to provide entertainment for the school fiesta in June 1967. The Americans are left to right, MAJ Shelton, SFC Harold T. Carpenter, the Bolivian professional cazador, Manuel Jesus, and SFC William R. Bush.

Shelton also made a very conscious effort not to undermine the local economy. Beer and sodas were not to be bought in Santa Cruz and brought back to the camp. The team would patronize the establishments of La Esperanza who got their supplies via the busses from the city.²⁸ Getting U.S. Embassy support for a new school became Shelton's toughest challenge.

The biggest civic action project for MTT-BL 404-67X was the construction of a new school for La Esperanza. MAJ Shelton made that decision in late April before training began. Erwin Bravo, the mayor, arranged a meeting with the town leaders, Harry Singh from the Paul Hardeman Construction Company, Sanford White from USAID, Shelton, and LTC José R. Gallardo, the Ranger Battalion commander, to get support for a new, larger school.

"Our musical group was usually me on my Gibson guitar, Fricke on the wash tub bass, Bush on the spoons, and someone on the shakers," said MAJ Shelton.³¹

Labor was to be provided by the La Esperanza villagers and Ranger Battalion personnel with construction skills. The lion's share of the money for the building materials would come from USAID. Bravo suggested a school *fiesta* to launch the effort. It was set for 25 June 1967 when the priest was available to give a blessing to the project. He wanted to get the whole community behind the effort. He thought that donations, regardless of the amount, would bolster commitment.²⁹ Construction materials arrived in mid-July for local workers to get started on the new school.³⁰

Progress on the new school was constantly slowed down by USAID payments. MAJ Shelton doggedly kept

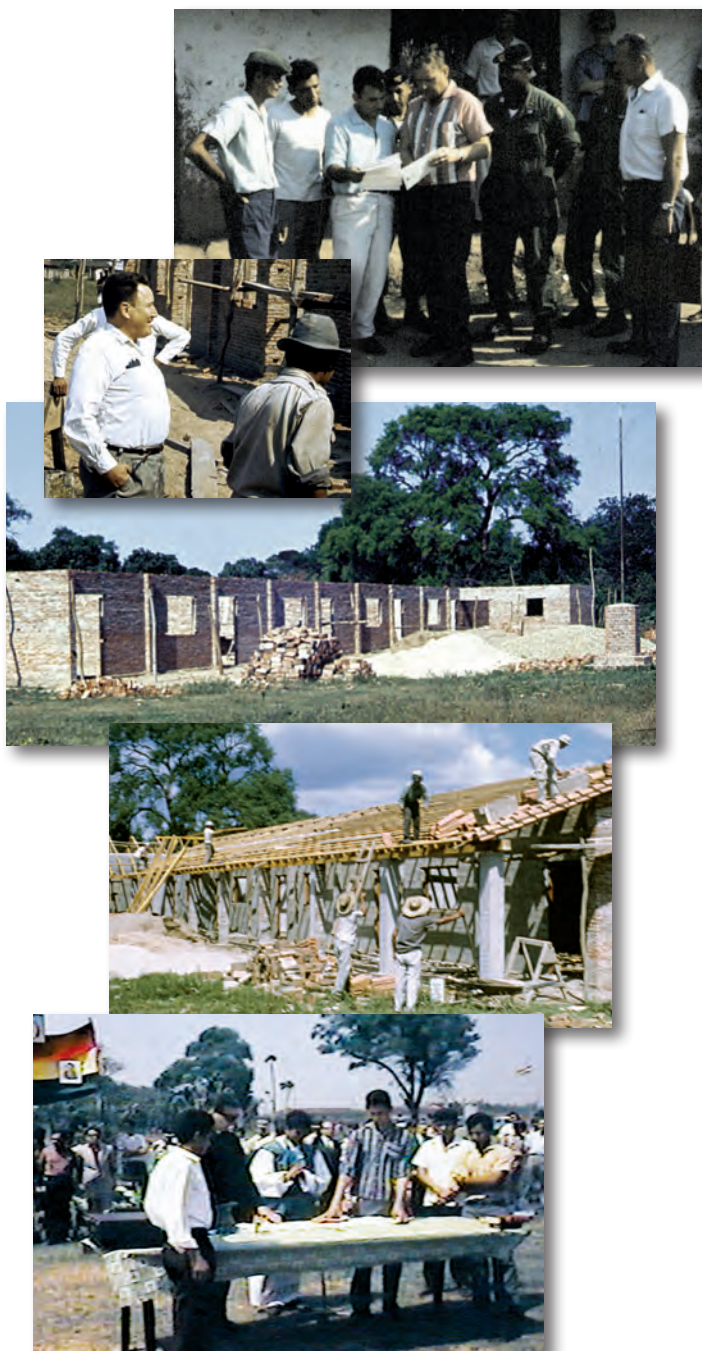


Traditionally, local priests in Bolivia sanctified community construction projects with a blessing. Working with local people proved to be lot easier than with the USAID at the embassy in La Paz.

up pressure on the regional USAID director, Sanford White, in Santa Cruz, who dribbled the money down a tight funnel to Harry Singh, the road builder. The three month project was dragged out almost six months by the embassy bureaucrat.³² Intervention by GEN Porter in late August to get the windows and a roof on the building before the rains came actually slowed the project. To demonstrate who was in charge in Bolivia, Ambassador Douglas Henderson directed that USAID delay funds another month. "Though the bureaucratic pettiness of the State Department folks frustrated me to no end, it was seen as normal by Jorge, who had to depend on a national ministry and province officials to fund the school and pay his salary. That man had the patience of Job," said Shelton.³³ It was mid-October when White came to visit the school project in La Esperanza. He left \$800 for the roof and said that the ambassador was holding \$300 in reserve. In his November report the MTT commander wrote that window sills (without windows) had been installed and the roof was almost completed.³⁴ The six-room (an office and five classrooms) school was finished about a week before the American soldiers returned to the Canal Zone on 22 December. "Still, it was the best Christmas present we could have given those folks," said MAJ Shelton.³⁵

While field sanitation was critical to the training mission success, it was the practice of medicine and civic action projects that "won the hearts, minds, and loyal support of the people." These set positive conditions that enabled the SF MTT to mold 650 peasant conscripts and their officers into a well-trained, elite Ranger Battalion capable of defeating the Cuban-led insurgent threat in Bolivia in 1967. ♣

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The Special Forces officer in the top photo is Captain LeRoy Mitchell, who replaced Captain Edmond L. Fricke as the MTT deputy and operations officer. In the second photo down, the mayor, Erwin Bravo, surveys progress. In the bottom photo, the local priest holds a special Mass to bless the new school.

Endnotes

- 1 James A. Hapka, telephone interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 3 November 2008, Lawton, OK, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited as Hapka interview and date.
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- 11 Chapa and Peterson interview, 11 April 2007.
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- 15 Chapa interview, 18 April 2007, MTT BL 404-67X, 8th Special Forces Group (Airborne), 1st Special Forces, Special Action Force, Fort Gulick, Canal Zone. SUBJECT: Report of Mobile Training Team to Bolivia (RCS CSGPO-125), 30 November 1967, hereafter cited as 8th SFG MTT BL 404-67X SITREP dated 30 November 1967, and Roland J. Milliard, telephone interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 15 October 2008, Dracut, MA, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited as Milliard interview with date.
- 16 8th SFG MTT BL 404-67X After Action Report dated 22 December 1967.
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- 19 Chapa interview, 18 April 2007.
- 20 8th SFG MTT BL 404-67X SITREP dated 29 August 1967.
- 21 Chapa and Peterson interview, 11 April 2007, 8th SFG MTT BL 404-67X SITREP dated 29 August 1967, and Harold T. Carpenter, telephone interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 29 October 2008, Las Vegas, NV, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Ft Bragg, NC, hereafter cited as Carpenter interview with date.
- 22 Carpenter interview, 29 October 2008.
- 23 Kari Abood email to Dr. Troy J. Sacquety, subject: Peace Corps Historian dated 10 November 2008, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC., hereafter cited as Shelton interview with date.
- 24 Ralph W. Shelton, telephone interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 18 November 2008, Sweetwater, TN, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited as Shelton interview with date.
- 25 Hapka interviews, 3 and 19 November 2008.
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- 27 Shelton interview, 12 April 2007, Gomez interview, 14 November 2008, 8th SFG MTT BL 404-67X After Action report dated 22 December 1967, and Henry Butterfield Ryan, *The Fall of Che Guevara: A Story of Soldiers, Spies, and Diplomats* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1998), 95.
- 28 Carpenter interview, 18 November 2008.
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- 30 8th SFG MTT BL 404-67X SITREP dated 29 July 1967.
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- 32 8th SFG MTT BL 404-67X SITREPs dated 29 May 1967, 29 June 1967, 29 July 1967, and 29 August 1967.
- 33 Shelton interview, 13 April 2007 and 8th SFG MTT BL 404-67X SITREP dated 30 September 1967.
- 34 8th SFG MTT BL 404-67X SITREP dated 30 November 1967.
- 35 Shelton interview, 13 April 2007.



Turning the Tables on Che: The Training at La Esperanza

By Kenneth Finlayson

A hallmark of Army Special Forces is the ability to organize and conduct the training of indigenous military forces in less than ideal situations. When the main body of the 8th Special Forces Group Mobile Training Team (MTT) BL 404-67X arrived in La Esperanza, Bolivia on 29 April 1967 to begin a 179-day deployment, the men were struck by the primitive conditions of the tiny village. "It was pretty spartan," Sergeant First Class (SFC) Harold T. Carpenter recalled.¹ With a population of less than two hundred persons, La Esperanza had no electricity, running water, or indoor plumbing. Selected by the team leader Major (MAJ) Ralph W. "Pappy" Shelton for its access to suitable training areas, the town's remote location provided the operational security necessary to train the new Bolivian Ranger Battalion.

When guerrillas ambushed a unit of the Bolivian Army in March 1967, President René Barrientos Ortuño's response was to create a 650-man Ranger infantry battalion and ask the United States to assist in training the unit.² The task was given to the 8th Special Forces Group (8th SFG), who deployed MAJ Shelton's 16-man team.³ This article will describe the Ranger training program, the follow-on training requirement, and the experiences of the team members on this very successful mission.

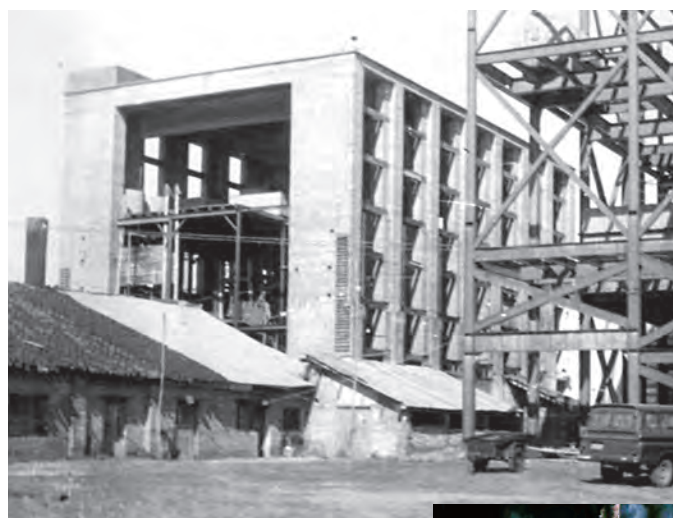
MAJ Shelton and his team developed a comprehensive 19-week training program with four phases. The training began with six weeks of basic individual training, a necessity for the untrained conscripts. Phase Two was three weeks of advanced individual training. Phase Three was three weeks of basic unit training starting with the rifle squad, progressing to the platoon (Bolivian section or *sección*), and company tactics. Phase Four lasted seven weeks and concentrated on advanced unit and counterinsurgency training, which culminated in a two-week field training exercise at the end.⁴ The team's mission was to turn brand-new draftees into Rangers. The Bolivian troops arrived in groups beginning in early May 1967. It was immediately apparent to the SF soldiers that they were starting at "Square One."

The Bolivian soldiers had the one uniform on their backs and a variety of weapons. They had no load-bearing equipment (LBE), canteens, or ponchos. The Bolivian Army did not have a packaged field ration. Food and water determined how far from La Esperanza they could train. Despite the best efforts of the SF team, the soldiers would not get these critical items until the training was nearly complete. The team worked through LTC Joseph Rice of the U.S. Military Group (MILGP) to obtain the equipment from war stocks in storage in the Canal Zone.⁵ Another hindrance was the quality of food provided by the Bolivian Army.

Sergeant (SGT) Alvin E. Graham, a radio operator recalled, "They would fold up a piece of bread and stuff it in their pocket for lunch. Their regular chow



The village of La Esperanza had no electricity, running water, or indoor plumbing. Many aspects of village life, such as grinding corn (insert), had changed little for generations.



The Rangers used an abandoned sugar mill at La Esperanza. The mill provided housing and a site for rappelling and a confidence course. Food for the Rangers, a mixture of rice, corn and some meat, was prepared in 55-gallon drums that served as communal feeding barrels. Observing the preparation is the Battalion S-4, a 1930s Chaco War veteran.



was just miserable. They took a 55-gallon drum, filled it with water, dumped in rice, potatoes, and maybe a small piglet, boiled it up, and everyone would eat out of the barrel."⁶ The poor diet did not provide enough calories to sustain troops undergoing rigorous training. The situation improved after the Bolivian Minister of Defense, General Suarez Guzman, and the Army Chief of Staff, General Alfredo Ovando Candia, visited on 31 May. They approved additional funds to buy specific, high calorie food, and the strength and stamina of the troops steadily improved.⁷ In spite of these problems, the SF team started training.



Phase I was designed to train the soldiers in basic skills. The assembly, disassembly and cleaning of the M-1 Garand was one of the tasks.

Sergeant First Class (SFC) Daniel V. Chapa, a light and heavy weapons sergeant said, "The troops had no previous military training. Their education level was just about zero. Most of them could speak some Spanish"⁸ SFC Hapka noted the difference between the soldiers and their officers. "The troops were untrained conscripts. The officers were of European descent. Most of them were pretty well-educated."⁹

The team made a special effort to incorporate the Bolivian officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) into the training. "We interacted a lot with the Bolivian officers and NCOs, particularly the company commanders and platoon leaders. We tried to get them involved as much as we could. It enhanced their credibility with their men," said SFC Harold T. Carpenter, the heavy weapons sergeant.¹⁰ "We used the Bolivian lieutenants, warrant



SGT Alvin E. Graham(r) training Bolivian infantrymen on the Browning M-1919A6 .30 caliber light machinegun. On Graham's right is a cameraman from a SOUTHCOM film crew. SGT Graham, SSG Wendell P. Thompson, and SGT Byron R. Sigg were all radio operators who served as assistant instructors on the firing ranges.

officers, and cadets as assistant instructors to foster a train-the-trainer philosophy. Then, they could work with those troops that required more training," said Staff Sergeant (SSG) Jerald L. Peterson, a medical specialist.¹¹ Forcing this interaction began in the initial basic training phase to build a bond between the officers and men that grew as the training progressed.

Phase I was designed to bring the soldiers to a basic level of proficiency in their individual soldier skills. "We used World War II-vintage training manuals from the School of the Americas at Fort Gulick [the Canal Zone, Panama] that had been translated into Spanish," said SFC Dan Chapa.¹² Physical training (PT), weapons training, land navigation, camouflage techniques, and basic patrolling were the primary topics.¹³ "We did about thirty minutes of calisthenics with the Bolivians and then went on runs to the range and back. They simply took off their fatigue shirts for PT," said Chapa.¹⁴ "We ran every morning," said SGT Alvin E. Graham. "Those guys would even run on patrols."¹⁵ Following PT, the troops would head out for the day's instruction, which in Phase I emphasized basic weapons training (assembly, disassembly, cleaning, and marksmanship).

The weapons specialist on the team, SFC Dan Chapa, was responsible for the weapons training. Other team members, notably SSG Wendell P. Thompson, SGT Byron R. Sigg, and SGT Alvin E. Graham, served as assistant instructors according to the daily training plan developed and monitored by the team sergeant, Master Sergeant (MSG) Oliverio Gomez. "We would have a meeting every morning to review the day's assignments," said SFC Carpenter. "Then each evening we would have a little debrief at the end of the training day."¹⁶ The eclectic mix of Bolivian weapons and the supply problems associated with getting the proper ammunition was a daily challenge for the "Weapons Committee."



SFC Harold T. Carpenter

DOB: 4 May 1941
POB: Martins Ferry, OH
HS: GED
Spanish: 8th SFG Courses

Army: Joined in 1956, BCT Ft Jackson, SC, AIT 101st Abn Div as infantryman, A Co, 506th Inf; 1957, Gyro to Mainz, Germany w/ A Co, 505th Inf, SGT FO Wpns PLT A/505; 1961, Fort Campbell, KY, 101st Abn Div, Inf Sqd Ldr C Co, 502nd Inf & A Co, 506th Inf; Mar 1963, Panama, 8th SFG "Q" Course, A Co 8th SFG, May 1965, MTT Honduras; Feb 1966, Vietnam, B-52, 5th SFG; Mar 1967, B Co, 8th SFG, Hvy Wpns SGT.¹



SSG Wendell P. Thompson, a radio operator, trained the Rangers on the Browning .30 caliber M-1919A6 light machinegun. Cross-trained as a light weapons specialist, Thompson worked as an assistant instructor during weapons training.



MSG Roland J. Milliard said. "We did rappelling off a thirty-foot high wall at the sugar mill." Rappelling, obstacle and confidence courses were all run at the mill and were designed to toughen the Rangers physically and build their confidence.

"As the primary light weapons instructor, I was told to prepare a marksmanship POI [program of instruction] and to order everything and anything that was needed to support the training, get the repair parts for weapons, the targets and the ammunition based on the number of rounds per man per day," said SFC Chapa. "Most would be .30 cal ball ammo for the M-1 Garands and carbines. The M-1919A6 light machineguns had belted ammo with tracers. Since we started before all the M-1 rifles and machineguns arrived from the Canal Zone, I had to really squeeze the Bolivian supply officer for the ammunition for the [Czech] Mausers and [Argentine] FALs."¹⁷

The supply officer was a lieutenant colonel and a hoary veteran of the 1935 Chaco War who was loath to part with "his" ammunition. "He always gave me half of what I requested each time. It was a constant fight to get what was needed to train the soldiers properly," said Chapa. "We were in Phase II before all the Bolivian soldiers were equipped with U.S. weapons."¹⁸

The ranges, just outside of town, needed to be inspected daily before firing commenced. "We had to clear the area around the ranges and areas where we did live fire training every day because there were peasants wandering all around the place, collecting firewood and tending animals," said Chapa.¹⁹ General Ovando, the Bolivian

Army Chief of Staff visited training with an Argentine Army major. The major was critical of the range firing. Chapa inquired when the last time he or the Argentine Army had seen combat. That silenced the major.²⁰ The training week at La Esperanza ran Monday through Friday, with Saturday used for making up missed training events and for additional instruction. Training lasted until late afternoon because the soldiers had to return to the camp to eat dinner and clean weapons before dark. Inclement weather was hard on the poorly clothed troops and played havoc with the training schedule.

Until June, the soldiers only had one uniform, and no ponchos or field jackets. If it rained, time had to be allowed for them to dry their clothes.²¹ During Phase II in June (the start of the Bolivian winter), four training days were lost when the *surazos*, a cold, rain-laden south wind blowing out of sub-Antarctic Patagonia swept through the area.²² The troops huddled in their warehouse barracks. Lost training days were made up when the *surazos* ceased.

Advanced individual training was the focus of the second phase. Three weeks (19 June to 9 July) were devoted to the different military occupation specialties (MOS) requirements such as medical, communications, advanced marksmanship for snipers, and crew-served weapons gunners, and leadership and staff training for

Home on the range. It was a daily ritual to clear the range and training areas of livestock and people before the commencement of live fire training.





"The Rangers loved the Slide for Life," said MSG Roland J. Milliard. "It was like a carnival ride for them."



The SF team set up an obstacle course using storage tanks in the sugar mill. SSG Jerald L. Peterson noted, "The Indians didn't have much upper body strength. They struggled with the rope climbing."



SFC Dan Chapa directed firing from the makeshift range tower. Chapa had a daily battle with the battalion supply office, a Chaco War veteran, over the allocation of Mauser ammunition.

the officers and NCOs. "Ranger training" was introduced. It consisted of rappelling, Ranger operations (ambushes, raids, and patrols), and combat conditioning exercises with makeshift confidence tests and obstacle courses.²³ This phase was designed to bring the troops to a high level of individual soldier proficiency before the collective training in small unit operations began. The abandoned sugar mill structure provided the training platform.

"We did rappelling off the side of the mill, about thirty feet high," said MSG Roland J. Milliard, an intelligence specialist. "We set up a confidence course there with a rope climb and the "Slide for Life" into the [nearby village] pond."²⁴ "The rappelling was done from the flat roof of the sugar mill laboratory next to the sugar

cane truck weigh station," said SFC Chapa. "It was high enough to give them the feel of rappelling and having a flat wall emphasized the need to get your legs horizontal to the ground, lean back and walk down."²⁵ There was a one-rope bridge constructed to cross a water obstacle for training on the "Ranger Crawl."²⁶ The confidence course proved to be a daunting task for many.

"The Indians from the *altiplano* didn't have much upper body strength," said SSG Peterson. "They struggled with rope climbing and we had to put more upper body exercises into the PT program."²⁷ The obstacle course around the mill required the Rangers to jump off a large storage tank. The SF team placed mattresses at the base of the tank after a spate of twisted ankles.²⁸ The courses built up confidence and toughness. The Rangers particularly loved the Slide for Life. "It was a carnival ride for them," said MSG Milliard.²⁹

Phase II also focused on improving the soldier's individual proficiency and training on assigned specialties. CPT Margarito Cruz and MSG Milliard worked with the battalion reconnaissance section on intelligence collection. Cruz provided his "agents" with pistols and wristwatches and sent them out to gather information about the insurgents³⁰

SFC Dan Chapa developed a program for snipers. "I told SGTs [Alvin E.] Graham and [Byron R.] Sigg to identify three or four of the best riflemen in each company for advanced training as snipers. We had a few M-1D Garands, the sniper version. Their 7 mm Argentine Mausers were good sniper weapons, but the ammunition was too old and of poor quality," said Chapa. "So I used the M-1Ds with binoculars and spotting scopes. I had some .30 caliber match ammunition to teach them the basics: factoring for the effects of wind; and extended range shooting by elevating the sights. The M-1D had a heavier, harder barrel and the lands and grooves were well defined for accuracy."³¹ In addition to the mechanics of firing, Chapa explained proper employment of snipers. "I taught them counter-sniper techniques. The best



CPT Margarito Cruz and MSG Roland J. Milliard trained the Ranger Battalion Reconnaissance section in intelligence collection. These Ranger/agents were sent out to gather information about the insurgents. They were issued wristwatches to be able to accurately record the time when they collected the intelligence. Two men were captured by Che's foco, but released unharmed.



SFC Richard J. Kimmich demonstrates loading the M20A1 3.5-inch rocket launcher. The team used a pile of paper boxes to show the effects of the weapon's back blast. SSG James A.

Hapka (right), a medical specialist instructs on the M2 60 mm mortar. Along with the Browning M-1919A6 light machinegun, the M2 mortars were used in the heavy weapons section in each Ranger company. The "collar" on the Ranger is a carrying pad.



defense against a sniper is another sniper," he said. "The men assembled outside my 'hootch' after training, and I worked with them one-on-one with sniping skills, and tactics, and explained how they would be used to the best advantage in a rifle company. A sniper works on soldiers psychologically because he represents the unknown, the constant long-range threat to the infantrymen."³² While Chapa trained the individual snipers, other team members worked with the gunners of the crew-served weapons.

To demonstrate the effects of the M20A1 3.5-inch antitank rocket launcher, the SF troops stacked up three 55-gallon drums to form a pyramid. They put a pile of paper boxes behind the anti-tank team to show the danger of the weapon's back blast. "SGT Alvin Graham loaded the weapon, and SSG Wendell Thompson fired it. The Bolivian soldiers were impressed with the firepower of the weapon and could readily see the need to stay out of the zone of the back blast when the boxes caught fire," said SSG Peterson.³³ Graham and SFC Chapa trained the mortar crews on the U.S. 81 and 60 mm mortars and the older French 82 mm systems.

"We had about twenty guys for the mortar squads. We tried to take the smartest guys we could find," said Graham.³⁴ The crews learned the proper techniques for employing the system, fire direction procedures, and forward observer duties.³⁵ "We taught them how to use the mortars to cover dead space and support the riflemen," said MSG Milliard.³⁶ The completion of the advanced individual training was followed by small unit tactics in Phase III.

The basic collective training concentrated on squad and platoon-level movement techniques, fire and maneuver,

and patrolling.³⁷ From 10 July to 29 July, the training progressed from the squad-level up through platoon tactical operations.³⁸ Heavy emphasis was placed on directing movements with hand and arm signals, and to control the squads during fire and maneuver. This concluded with live-fire exercises. "Our pop-up targets for the live-fire immediate action drills were simple, but effective," said Dan Chapa. "Some were hinged to trees with rubber tire tubing and pulled around with commo wire. Others were mounted in a row on logs and we "daisy-chained" the targets together so that you could pull all of them up simultaneously."³⁹ The live fire events were very popular with the Rangers. "The Bolivian officers always wanted to do the immediate action lanes twice, especially if they missed a target. They were very competitive among themselves," said Chapa.⁴⁰ It was during the small-unit collective training that the number of officers became a problem.

During the first two phases, the officers had been "dual-hatted" to perform the battalion staff duties. During the collective training, the officers were needed to lead their companies and platoons. MAJ Shelton noted, "In the past, the company commanders doubled as the battalion staff, which was sufficient. However, with the battalion about to go operational, this problem became more apparent and severe."⁴¹ The situation was further exacerbated by the loss of three military academy cadets who were assigned as platoon leaders. They returned to La Paz to complete their coursework for graduation and did not return until December. Officers were not the only things in short supply.

The lack of individual equipment still had not been rectified in July. Canteens and LBE were not available for all troops. Gasoline for the trucks and jeep was in very short supply. SFC Del Toro from the MILGP's Cochabamba detachment came to La Esperanza twice to give driver's training and preventative maintenance, but the lack of fuel and spare parts prevented him from conducting any meaningful instruction.⁴² Still, as the third phase ended, morale in the battalion was high and the Rangers were eager to get into their final four weeks of training.

General René Barrientos Ortuño, the President of Bolivia, visited La Esperanza on 29 July to talk with the Rangers. "His address was a great morale booster to the Battalion," said MAJ Shelton. "It came at an opportune time and carried them through some of the more arduous training in Phase IV."⁴³ As part of the celebration of the Bolivian Army's birthday on 7 August, the troops donned green berets, the distinctive unit headgear chosen for the Ranger Battalion (an initiative of CPT Edmund Fricke).⁴⁴ It was a sign that the training was nearing completion.

Phase IV was advanced unit training, which included operations at the company and battalion level, and counterinsurgency training. It ended with a battalion Field Training Exercise (FTX). This phase lasted from 30 July to 17 September. The capstone FTX was conducted 15 miles southwest of the town of Santa Cruz (75 miles from La Esperanza) because it closely replicated the "Red Zone"

terrain where the Rangers would soon be operating.⁴⁵ The SF team worked to inject as much realism into the instruction as possible. "As part of the immediate action training, we set up a little mock village to teach the soldiers how to properly clear buildings without harassing the local people," said SFC Dan Chapa. "Some of the role players dressed up as women. That got a real 'hoot' from the troops, but they did learn."⁴⁶ This was their final evaluation before being committed to combat against Che Guevara and his guerrillas.

A formal graduation ceremony and parade was held at the headquarters of the 8th Division (the Rangers' parent headquarters) on 17 September in Santa Cruz. His Excellency, Adolfo Siles, the Vice President of Bolivia, officiated with Colonel Joaquín Zenteno Anaya, the 8th Division commander. A religious mass concluded with the blessing of the company guidons. Vice President Silas, Colonel Zenteno, and MAJ Shelton addressed the troops in turn, and it was broadcast on Bolivian National Radio.⁴⁷ Each member of the SF team was given a special certificate. "The Vice President gave each of us a *Diploma de Honor*," recalled SGT Alvin E. Graham.⁴⁸ During the graduation, the Rangers were awarded the coveted "Condor Badge," their distinctive qualification badge. MTT BL 404-67X returned to La Esperanza when the Rangers boarded trucks for the "Red Zone."



Ranger graduates proudly wear green berets, their distinctive unit headgear.



The Condor Wings, the distinctive qualification badge of the Bolivian Ranger Battalion. CPT Edmond L. Fricke was instrumental in obtaining the berets and badges for the Rangers.



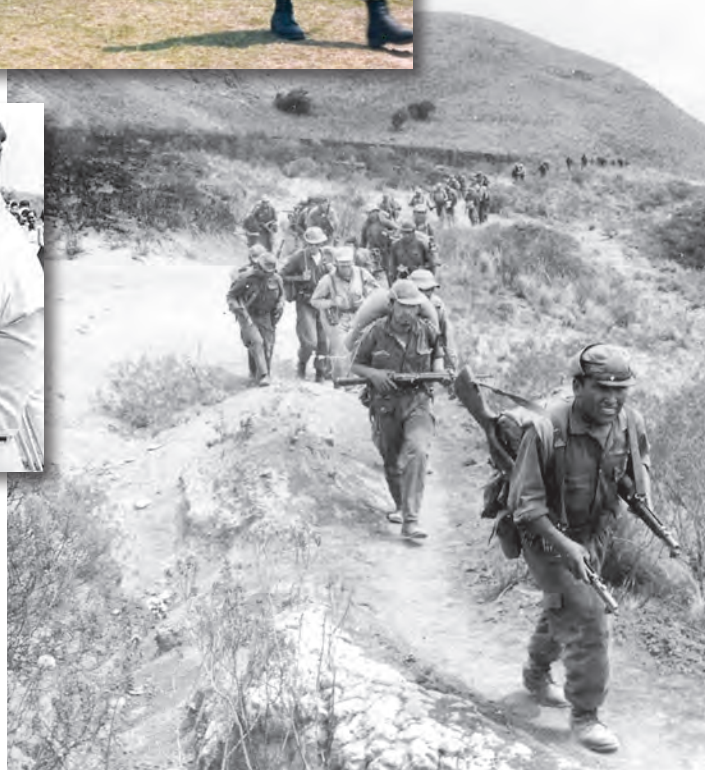
The Rangers completed their 19-week training course on 17 September 1967. A parade was held at the 8th Division Headquarters in Santa Cruz. In less than two weeks, the Rangers were in combat with the insurgents. Captain Celso Torrelio leads Company A in a "pass in review."



*SFC Harold T. Carpenter receives his *Diploma de Honor* from Bolivian Vice President Adolfo Siles. Each member of the team received a certificate to recognize his training efforts with the Rangers.*

An arduous two-week field training exercise was the culminating event of the 19-week training program.

The exercise was held 75 miles southwest of La Esperanza, 15 miles south of Santa Cruz in terrain similar to the "Red Zone."





The second phase of the SF team's mission was to give refresher training to nine Bolivian infantry companies at La Esperanza. The site became an official Bolivian Army training center when the Special Forces team left in December. (Left) CPT James Trimble and SFC Dan Chapa observe a field expedient method of cleaning a 60 mm mortar.

Beginning just twelve days after their graduation, the Rangers engaged and defeated the insurgents, ending Che's dream of inciting a revolution in Bolivia. For the SF team, they had a brief respite before starting their new mission, training nine Bolivian infantry companies. These companies would be ready to continue the fight against the insurgents if the Rangers did not destroy them.

"In early July [10 July] I was called back to Panama by GEN [Robert W.] Porter, the U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) commander," said MAJ Shelton. "Before leaving La Paz, the [CIA] Station Chief and I had a long conversation. He felt that the U.S. needed to maintain a training presence in Bolivia after we finished with the 2nd Ranger Battalion. This became the genesis for our follow-on mission: to provide refresher tactical and COIN [counterinsurgency] training to nine Bolivian infantry companies."⁴⁹ Ten team members flew back to the Canal Zone to see their families. Shelton and four men remained at La Esperanza to secure the equipment. Eleven men and 4,000 pounds of ammunition, M-1 carbines, and equipment returned to Santa Cruz on 4 October to begin Phase II of their mission.⁵⁰ Several of the men were new replacements.

Three rotations of three infantry companies each trained at La Esperanza. Each rotation was four weeks long. The first iteration was Company A, 4th Division, Company B, 5th Division, and Company C, 3rd Division, for a total of 337 officers and men. The second cycle was Company B, 4th Division, Company C, 5th Division, and the *Esquadron* (Squadron) *Baun*, 8th Division, for 338 men in all. The final rotation included Companies A and C, 7th Division and Company E, 3rd Division, totaling 316 soldiers.⁵¹

The POI for the infantry tactics refresher was similar in many respects to the one used for the Ranger Battalion. It placed emphasis on weapons training, advanced individual skills, small unit tactics, and counter-guerrilla operations. Unlike the Ranger conscripts, the infantry

companies that came to La Esperanza were already organized. "The infantry rifle companies that came for refresher training had already received some rudimentary training and had assigned officers and some NCOs. They were already equipped," recalled SFC Dan Chapa. "They wore camouflage fatigues unlike the Rangers."⁵² The refresher training was conducted by Special Forces soldiers to help the Bolivian Army to train its own cadre. La Esperanza would become an official Bolivian Army training site.

In the second rotation, Colonel Constantino Valencia assumed command of the new *Centro de Instrucción Especial de Operaciones* (CIEOP). "The POI was changed to reflect his emphasis, which was on counter-guerrilla operations," said MAJ Shelton. "Courses in intelligence collection, target detection, and more practical work in patrolling and operations against

irregular forces were added."⁵³ The Special Forces soldiers shifted to a "train-the-trainer" role. In the third rotation, they handed over the primary responsibility for



SSG Wendell P. Thompson, SGT Alvin E. Graham and SFC Daniel V. Chapa with a Bolivian officer prior to conducting an airborne proficiency jump near La Esperanza on 7 July. The jump was made from a Bolivian version of this USAF H-19B helicopter (L).

instruction to the Bolivian cadre. The Americans ended their active participation on 15 December, halfway into the third cycle. The team's advance party left Bolivia on 19 December for Fort Gulick and the main body returned to the Canal Zone on 22 December. All together the team trained 1600 Bolivian Army Rangers and infantrymen.⁵⁴

The experience of Mobile Training Team 404-67X was typical in most respects for SF teams deployed throughout Latin America during the 1960s. Long, arduous training days and primitive living conditions were commonplace. Mandatory jump proficiency training and a multitude of American and Bolivian VIP visits were all part of the package. During their deployment, the members of the team did airborne proficiency jumps to avoid pay interruptions. One was from an H-19 helicopter near La Esperanza, and the other from a Bolivian C-46 with the Bolivian Airborne School students at Cochabamba.⁵⁵ The

General Robert W. Porter, SOUTHCOM Commander with MAJ Ralph W. Shelton during a visit to La Esperanza. A staunch supporter of the mission, Porter provided gold and silver watches to the outstanding Ranger officers and soldiers.



team received a steady stream of visitors that included Bolivian President Barrientos, Major General William E. Depuy, the U.S. Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities (SACSA), and GEN Robert W. Porter, the SOUTHCOM Commander.⁵⁶ Porter was the “Godfather” for the sensitive mission, and during a visit on 25 August, he presented gold wristwatches to the outstanding Bolivian officers and silver ones to the best Rangers from each company.⁵⁷ The team also hosted film crews from SOUTHCOM, the Department of the Army, and from Granada Television of England, who documented the last two weeks of training. For the team, the highpoint of the deployment came not at the end, but on 8 October 1967 when the news reached them that Che Guevara had been captured.

Their pride in the Rangers was immense. “We trained those guys like they were our own,” said SFC Dan Chapa.⁵⁸ “Pappy Shelton had built up a terrific relationship with the whole battalion,” said First Lieutenant Harvey Wallender. “The men worshipped him, followed him around. Down in the jungle, Che Guevara kept offering ‘Two, three, many Vietnams,’ but what these *soldaditos* wanted was lots more guys like Pappy.”⁵⁹ SGT Alvin E. Graham remembers, “Once we heard the Rangers got Che, we felt like we were coasting.”⁶⁰ Looking back, MSG Roland J. Milliard felt “It was one of the most successful SF missions ever. We have different people searching for Che Guevara in different countries. First in Latin America, in Southeast Asia and down that way. But here I guess his luck ran out. And those Rangers just ate him up.”⁶¹ The Team Leader, MAJ Ralph “Pappy” Shelton summed it up by saying “We turned the tables on Che. He wrote the book, but our guys did it.”⁶² ▲

Kenneth Finlayson is the USASOC Deputy Command Historian. He earned his PhD from the University of Maine, and is a retired Army officer. Current research interests include Army special operations during the Korean War, special operations aviation, and World War II special operations units.

Several film crews visited the team at La Esperanza. While SFC Dan Chapa gives instruction to a Bolivian infantryman on the M-1919A6 light machinegun, a motion picture cameraman from the Department of the Army films the training. A still photographer from Granada Television in England takes photographs for use in their documentary. Crews from SOUTHCOM, ABC and CBS News also filmed the team.

Endnotes

- 1 Harold T. Carpenter, 8th Special Forces Group, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 24 October 2008, telephonic digital interview, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 2 The Ranger battalion was formed on the U.S. Army's World War II Infantry Company Table of Organization. It had three rifle companies, one heavy weapons company, and a very small headquarters section with communications and reconnaissance capability. Gary Prado Salmón, *The Defeat of Che Guevara: Military Response to Guerrilla Challenge in Bolivia*, (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1987), 245.
- 3 The MTT was composed of four officers and 12 enlisted men. It was a composite from both the 8th SFG companies. The team reflected the assessment that communications and the training of the battalion staff officers would be important. Hence the team had more officers and communications personnel than would normally be on a mission of this type.
- 4 Mobile Training Team BL 404-67X, 8th Special Forces Group, “Program of Instruction: Infantry Unit Operations,” April 1967, page 2, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 5 Listed in the MTT After Action report as the Ranger Battalion Project Officer, LTC Rice and MAJ Shelton were at odds about roles and responsibilities throughout the deployment. The soon-to-retire Shelton felt little need for diplomacy when dealing with Rice. 8th Special Forces Group (Airborne), MTT BL 404-67X MTT Activity Report, 29 May 1967 through 29 June 1967, dated 29 June 1967, page 1, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Ralph W. Shelton, 8th Special Forces Group, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 12 April 2007, Sweetwater, TN, digital interview, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 6 Alvin E. Graham, 8th Special Forces Group, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 21 October 2008, telephonic digital interview, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 7 8th Special Forces Group (Airborne), MTT BL 404-67X MTT Activity Report, 29 May 1967 through 29 June 1967, dated 29 June 1967, page 1, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 8 Daniel V. Chapa, 8th Special Forces Group, interview by Dr. Kenneth Finlayson, 19 November 2008, Fort Bragg, NC, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 9 Hapka interview, 3 November 2008.
- 10 Harold T. Carpenter, 8th Special Forces Group, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 29 October 2008, digital interview, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 11 Jerald L. Peterson, 8th Special Forces Group, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, Fort Bragg, NC, 6 October 2007, digital interview, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 12 Chapa interview, 11 April 2007.
- 13 Mobile Training Team BL 404-67X, 8th Special Forces Group, “Program of Instruction for Infantry Unit Operations,” April 1967, pages 3-7, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 14 Chapa interview, 18 April 2007.
- 15 Graham interview, 21 October 2008.
- 16 Carpenter interview, 24 October 2008.
- 17 Chapa interview, 18 April 2007. During the team's deployment, over 362,000 rounds of .30 caliber ammunition were expended. The average Bolivian rifleman received 10 rounds annually for marksmanship training. M-1s and carbines with ammunition came on a regular basis as part of the resupply from the Canal Zone. It was August before all the Rangers were carrying U.S. rifles.



- 18 One night the camp was alerted to the possible presence of armed groups in the area. The old Bolivian S-4 was nowhere to be found. The team had to shoot the lock off the storage shed to get the ammunition for issue to the troops on the perimeter. Needless to say, the colonel was not pleased with the ruined lock. Chapa interview, 18 April 2007; Mobile Training Team BL 404-67X, 8th Special Forces Group, "After Action Report," 22 December 1967, Logistics Annex, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 19 Daniel V. Chapa and Jerald L. Peterson, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 11 April 2007, Fort Bragg, NC, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 20 Chapa interview, 18 April 2007.
- 21 Chapa interview, 18 April 2007.
- 22 8th Special Forces Group (Airborne), MTT BL 404-67X MTT Activity Report, 29 May 1967 through 29 June 1967, dated 29 June 1967, page 1, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 23 Mobile Training Team BL 404-67X, 8th Special Forces Group, "Program of Instruction for Infantry Unit Operations," April 1967, pages 8-11, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 24 The Slide for Life is a confidence building exercise in which an individual rides down a cable suspended at an angle over a body of water. Holding the handle of a rolling pulley on the cable, the rider slides down. The ride ends when the rider releases the handle and drops into the water. Roland J. Milliard, 8th Special Forces Group, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 22 October 2008, telephonic digital interview, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 25 Chapa interview, 18 April 2007.
- 26 The Ranger Crawl is accomplished by lying horizontally on a single rope. By hooking one foot over the rope, the individual pulls himself along. Shelton interview, 12 April 2007.
- 27 Jerald L. Peterson, 8th Special Forces Group, interview by Dr. Kenneth Finlayson, 19 November 2008, Fort Bragg, NC, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 28 Peterson interview, 19 November 2008.
- 29 Roland J. Milliard, 8th Special Forces Group, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 22 October 2008, telephonic digital interview, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 30 CPT Margarito Cruz was attached to the MTT from the 801st Military Intelligence Detachment of the 8th SAF. He and MSG Milliard trained a team of seven agents to go out and collect information on the guerrillas. They were deployed into the area of operations when the Rangers went after the insurgents. The soldier/agents were rewarded with wristwatches and pistols.
- 31 Chapa and Peterson interview, 11 April 2007. Lands are the raised portions between the grooves in the bore of the rifle that impart spin to the bullet. Frank A. Moyer, *Special Forces Foreign Weapons Handbook* (Boulder, CO: Panther Publications, 1970), 306.
- 32 Chapa and Peterson interview, 11 April 2007.
- 33 Chapa and Peterson interview, 11 April 2007.
- 34 Graham interview, 21 October 2008.
- 35 Mobile Training Team BL 404-67X, 8th Special Forces Group, "Program of Instruction for Infantry Unit Operations," April 1967, page 9, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 36 Milliard interview, 22 October 2008.
- 37 Mobile Training Team BL 404-67X, 8th Special Forces Group, "Program of Instruction for Infantry Unit Operations," April 1967, pages 12-14, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 38 Prado, *The Defeat of Che Guevara: Military Response to Guerrilla Challenge in Bolivia*, 245.
- 39 Chapa interview, 18 April 2007.
- 40 Chapa interview, 18 April 2007.
- 41 8th Special Forces Group (Airborne), MTT BL 404-67X MTT Activity Report, 30 June 1967 through 29 July 1967, dated 29 July 1967, page 2, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 42 8th Special Forces Group (Airborne), MTT BL 404-67X MTT Activity Report, 30 June 1967 through 29 July 1967, dated 29 July 1967, page 2, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 43 8th Special Forces Group (Airborne), MTT BL 404-67X MTT Activity Report, 30 June 1967 through 29 August 1967, dated 29 August 1967, page 1, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 44 8th Special Forces Group (Airborne), MTT BL 404-67X MTT Activity Report, 30 July 1967 through 29 September 1967, dated 30 September 1967, page 1, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 45 8th Special Forces Group (Airborne), MTT BL 404-67X MTT Activity Report, 29 August 1967 through 29 September 1967, dated 30 September 1967, page 1, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 46 Chapa interview, 18 April 2007.
- 47 8th Special Forces Group (Airborne), MTT BL 404-67X MTT Activity Report, 30 June 1967 through 29 July 1967, dated 29 July 1967, page 1, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 48 Graham interview, 21 October 2008.
- 49 Ralph W. Shelton, 8th Special Forces Group, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 1 October 2008, telephonic digital interview, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 50 CPT Edmond L. Fricke, CPT James Trimble, CPT Margarito Cruz, SFC Richard A. Kimmich and SSG Jerald L. Peterson were replaced by CPT Leroy Mitchell, 1LT Harvey W. Wallender, SFC Harold T. Carpenter, SFC Johnnie E. Reynolds and SFC Robert L. Owens. 8th Special Forces Group (Airborne), MTT BL 404-67X MTT Activity Report, 30 September 1967 through 29 October 1967, dated 1 November 1967, page 1, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 51 Mobile Training Team BL 404-67X, 8th Special Forces Group, "After Action Report," 22 December 1967, page 3, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 52 Chapa interview, 18 April 2007.
- 53 Mobile Training Team BL 404-67X, 8th Special Forces Group, "After Action Report," 22 December 1967, page 3, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 54 Mobile Training Team BL 404-67X, 8th Special Forces Group, "Report of Mobile Training Team to Bolivia (RCS CSGPO-125)," 10 December 1967, page 2, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 55 On 7 July 1967, U.S. Air Force CPT "Hoss" McBride, 605th Air Commando Squadron of the 6th Special Operations Wing, flew a Bolivian H-19B helicopter from Cochabamba to La Esperanza to support a training jump of the MTT members. The parachute drop, at an 800' altitude, was made on 8 July near a Swiss-owned operational sugar mill. The mill was about 10 miles east of La Esperanza. Several airborne-qualified Bolivian officers jumped with the Americans. The Bolivian Airborne Battalion at Cochabamba furnished parachutes. The second jump operation was conducted at Cochabamba, located at an altitude of 10,000' from a C-46 on 19 October. Both jumps were for pay purposes. 8th Special Forces Group (Airborne), MTT BL 404-67X MTT Activity Report, 30 June 1967 through 29 July 1967, dated 29 July 1967, page 2, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; 8th Special Forces Group (Airborne), MTT BL 404-67X MTT Activity Report, 30 September 1967 through 29 October 1967, dated 1 November 1967, page 1, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 56 MG William E. Depuy was a noted author on military tactics and asked MAJ Shelton if he was familiar with the concept of the mobile defense. Shelton replied he had read about it in *Infantry Magazine*. "Well I'm the author," said Depuy. "No s**t, you wrote that," said the irrepressible Shelton.
- 57 8th Special Forces Group (Airborne), MTT BL 404-67X MTT Activity Report, 30 July 1967 through 29 August 1967, dated 29 August 1967, page 2, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC. One of Bolivian NCOs, SGT Huanca of B Company would later distinguish himself during the fight against Che's guerrillas.
- 58 Chapa interview, 19 November 2008.
- 59 Andrew St. George, "How the U.S. Got Che," *True*, April 1968, 97.
- 60 Graham interview, 21 October 2008.
- 61 Milliard interview, 22 October 2008; Michèle Ray, "In Cold Blood: How the CIA Executed Che," *Ramparts*, March 1968, 29.
- 62 Shelton interview, 12 April 2007.

RECOMPENSA

\$b. 10.000.—
(DIEZ MILLONES DE BOLIVIANOS)
POR CADA UNO VIVO
En lo posible

IDOLEROS MERCENARIOS AL SERVICIO DEL CASTROCOMUNISMO
SANTOS DE LUTO Y DOLOR EN LOS HOGARES BOLIVIANOS
RESULTA CIERTA, DARA DERECHO A LA RECOMPENSA

Boliviano, Ayúdanos a Capturarlos Vivos.



Urbano

Nacionalidad: cubana. — Edad:
28 años. — Estatura Aprox. 1.65 m.
Color de la piel: Moreno oscuro. —
Rasgos faciales: De raza negra. —
Nariz ancha. Boca grande.



Inti

Nacionalidad: boliviana. — Edad:
Aprox. 33 años. — Estatura aprox.
1.70 m. — Cara delgada. Ojos
oscuros. Cabello negro. Frente
ancha, cabellos ondulados.



Darío

Nacionalidad: boliviana. — Edad:
Aprox. 35 años. — Estatura aprox.
1.75 m. — Cara delgada. Ojos
oscuros. Cabello negro. Frente
ancha, cabellos ondulados.

Che's Posse: Divided, Attrited, and Trapped

by Robert W. Jones, Jr.

el guerrillero boliviano Jalisco, Arana Campero, "El Chaco", murió ayer en el combate producido en la zona de Nanchu, a orillas del Río Gran Chaco. En la fotografía, "El Chaco" aparece en la zona de Nanchu algunos meses atrás, cuando las guerrillas aún estaban en preparación.

tegió el fuego de las tropas, el compañero que estaba a su lado, tregó al compañero que estaba a su lado.

Así comenzó el combate. Las tropas llegaron a utilizar incluso morteros hasta que lograron dar muerte a los cuatro guerrilleros que se defendieron hasta el final.

A las diez de la mañana, después de los disparos de los guerrilleros cesaron. Una patrulla de reconocimiento salió hacia el lugar y se encontró con los cadáveres de cuatro guerrilleros.

Se trata según se informó en el momento.



Examples of wanted posters distributed throughout the country depicting the guerrillas.



Pombo



Benigno

Benigno, Natio, Pombo y Urbano, son cuatro de los guerrilleros que todavía quedan vivos en el grupo. Otro de los sobrevivientes es el boliviano David Adriazola, cuyo nombre

In the morning of 20 April 1967 as three disheveled men hesitantly entered the small farming community of Muyupampa, they were immediately apprehended by the army.¹ Their paperwork identified them as journalists; however, their stories, and documents, raised suspicions. George Andrew Roth was a legitimate freelance journalist. Argentine Ciro Roberto Bustos had a forged passport and fake Bolivian press credentials (obtained by Tania).² Frenchman Régis Debray claimed to be a journalist and professor. Under cursory interrogation, Roth's legitimacy emphasized that the documents and behavior of the other two were phony. The quick arrests of Debray and Bustos were a severe blow to the strategic goals of the *foco*.³ In his diary Che wrote: "Danton [Debray] and Carlos [Bustos] fell victim to their own haste, their near desperation to leave, and my lack of energy to stop them, so that communication with Cuba (Danton) has been cut, and the plan of action in Argentina (Carlos) is lost."⁴

The fate of the divided guerrilla *foco* then became irrevocably linked to what happens to the three separate parties. The arrest of Régis Debray and Ciro Roberto Bustos caused a media frenzy as trial preparations began. The Frenchman got more attention in the international press because of his family connections.⁵ Joaquín's (Cuban Comandante Juan Vitalio Acuña Nuñez) "rearguard" first waited as ordered for three days, then resumed movement, searching vainly for Che's element. Che's "vanguard," with the majority of the *foco*, wandered around the area, searching for Joaquín and inevitably bumped into Bolivian units. Unbeknownst to Che and Joaquín, the fate of the Bolivian *foco* had been sealed by Debray and Bustos.



The commander of the rearguard "Joaquín" (Cuban Comandante Juan Vitalio Acuña Nuñez), from his forged Panamanian passport photo.

The two "revolutionaries" and journalist provided a wealth of information. Debray confirmed that Che Guevara was leading the insurgency to add more excitement. He was also carrying a coded message for Fidel Castro.⁶ Most devastating for the *foco* was a series of sketches Bustos drew of the guerrillas, including Guevara.⁷ Inti Peredo, one of the few escapees [survivors] later admitted that: "We were . . . not very surprised that he [Bustos] became a useful collaborator of the army, identifying the bodies of our dead comrades, and making drawings of our faces, in addition to supplying a series of factual descriptions about



Bustos' sketches prove invaluable to the Bolivian Army for identifying the guerrillas. The drawing of Che was compared to his captured Uruguayan passport and older photos by Bolivian intelligence.

us."⁸ After two years of speculation as to his whereabouts, there was no doubt that the revolutionary "boogeyman," Che Guevara, was in Bolivia.

The public announcements did little to affect Che's determination to continue. None of the captured guerrilla diaries define a specific objective for the coming months. One can only surmise that he had a long-range plan and he was sticking to it. The *foco* mission remained the same; the timetable had merely been accelerated. Instead of creating more base camps and training a larger guerrilla force, fighting would begin with what they had in place. The *foco* would continue moving and ambush Bolivian army units. They were operating on the premise that as news of the guerrilla victories spread, the peasant population would mobilize to support them, and volunteers would rally to the cause. Guerrilla successes would be the catalyst that solidified support for the growth of the movement. In April, Che wrote: "We had four additional actions, all with positive results in general and one very good: the ambush in which Rubio [unfortunately] died."⁹ The *foco* fight, albeit done separately, continued with Che in charge.

While escorting Debray, Bustos, and Roth to Muyupampa, Che had divided his small force into a vanguard and a rearguard. On 17 April, he detached the rearguard under the command of "Joaquín" (Juan Vitalio Acuña Nuñez). The fifteen-guerrilla rearguard included a doctor, three sick guerrillas (Tania, Moises Guevara, and Alejandro), and the four recently "discharged" Bolivian dregs.¹¹ The rearguard was to rest and wait for the vanguard at the village of Bella Vista for two or three days. That was Che's plan until he discovered a large army force at Muyupampa and shifted his route northwest towards Ticucha.¹² The circuitous route prevented him from rejoining Joaquín's unit in three days.

Without a radio Joaquín was unable to communicate with Che's vanguard. With only extremely vague orders, Joaquín left Bella Vista three or four days later, as directed. The two units wandered about the operational area for the

The *foco* of the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional de Bolivia*

The *foco* of the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional de Bolivia* was a mixed bag of guerrillas, with an almost equal split of Bolivians and “foreigners.” The 45 guerrillas included 16 Cubans, 24 Bolivians (of which 4 were “discharged dregs”), 3 Peruvians, and 2 Argentines (Che and Tania).¹ On 17 April the force was split in two elements.

Che's Vanguard

Che (Argentine)	Ricardo (Cuban)
Aniceto (Bolivian)	Rolando (Cuban)
Antonio (Cuban)	Serapio (Bolivian)
Arturo (Cuban)	Tuma (Cuban)
Benigno (Cuban)	Urbano (Cuban)
Camba (Bolivian)	Willy (Bolivian)

Chapaco (Bolivian)

Chino (Peruvian)

Coco (Bolivian)

Darío (Bolivian)

Eustaquio (Peruvian)

Inti (Bolivian)

Julio (Bolivian)

León (Bolivian)

Loro (Bolivian)

Miguel (Cuban)

Moro (Cuban)

Ñato (Bolivian)

Negro (Peruvian)

Pablito (Bolivian)

Pacho (Cuban)

Pombo (Cuban)

Raúl (Bolivian)

Joaquín's Rearguard

Joaquín (Cuban)

Alejandro (Cuban)

Apolinar (Bolivian)

Braulio (Cuban)

Ernesto (Bolivian)

Marcos (Cuban)

Moisés (Bolivian)

Pedro (Bolivian)

Serapio (Bolivian)

Tania (Argentine)

Víctor (Bolivian)

Water (Bolivian)

Paco (“discharged” Bolivian)

Pepe (“discharged” Bolivian)

Chingolo (“discharged” Bolivian)

Eusebio (“discharged” Bolivian)

Endnotes

- 1 Daniel James, *Che Guevara* (New York: Stein and Day, 1969), 222-227 and 248-249; Ernesto Guevara, edited by Daniel James, *The Complete Bolivian Diaries of Che Guevara and Other Captured Documents* (New York: Stein and Day, 1968), 324-327.

next four months looking for one another. Despite losing a third of his *foco* and most of the supplies (especially critical food and medicines), Che was still upbeat. His end of the month summary for April read: “A month in which everything resolved itself in a normal manner, considering the hazards of guerrilla warfare. The morale is good among all the combatants who have passed their preliminary test as guerrillas.”¹³

The two units remained on separate courses. During May and June, Che’s vanguard moved north towards the Ñancahuazú base camps over very rugged terrain and defeated small police and Army units at El Pincal, Caraguataenda, Muchiri, and Abapo.¹⁴ Most of the movement was done on foot, with a few mules and horses carrying supplies (that eventually became food). At one point they seized a Bolivian oil company truck to speed their movement, but got it stuck after only four or five kilometers. Worse though was losing “a package of dollars [\$2,000], which fell from Pombo’s bag,” when they abandoned the truck.¹⁵ Despite the victories, life in the field was taking its toll on the guerrillas.

The majority of Che’s vanguard were “Long March” veterans who had not rested sufficiently to regain their strength. Hacking their way through dense underbrush with machetes exhausted them even further. As the force moved, looking for food became a preoccupation. Che cited the various birds and animals shot by his force. The small stock of canned food was sparingly doled out to the fighters. At Ñancahuazú Camp #2 (“Bear” camp) on 7 May, the *foco* found one undiscovered cache. They had hoped to restock their meager supplies, but “the only food left was the lard. I [Che] felt faint and had to sleep for two hours before I could continue, at a slow and vacillating pace. In general, this was the tenor of the whole march. We ate “lard soup” at the first waterhole. The men are weak, and some of them are suffering from edema [swelling of feet and hands from lack of protein],” wrote Che on 9 May.¹⁶ As they continued, the group fell into a pattern.

Using the Cuban Revolution as his template, Che established a routine. In the small towns along their route of march, the guerrillas would either buy food or seize it as retribution for alleged or perceived cooperation with the government. Che might conduct a small medical clinic using their limited supplies, and conclude the event with a political recruiting speech to the villagers. Most did not understand the high Cuban-Spanish dialect. The ragged band then left.

On the international level, the news of the guerrilla movement was followed. But on the local level, the guerrillas gained no support. Someone usually reported their unit to the police or Army. Wounded Bolivian soldiers were treated and then given a political talk with the other prisoners. The guerrillas took their weapons and clothes and then sent them on their way.¹⁷

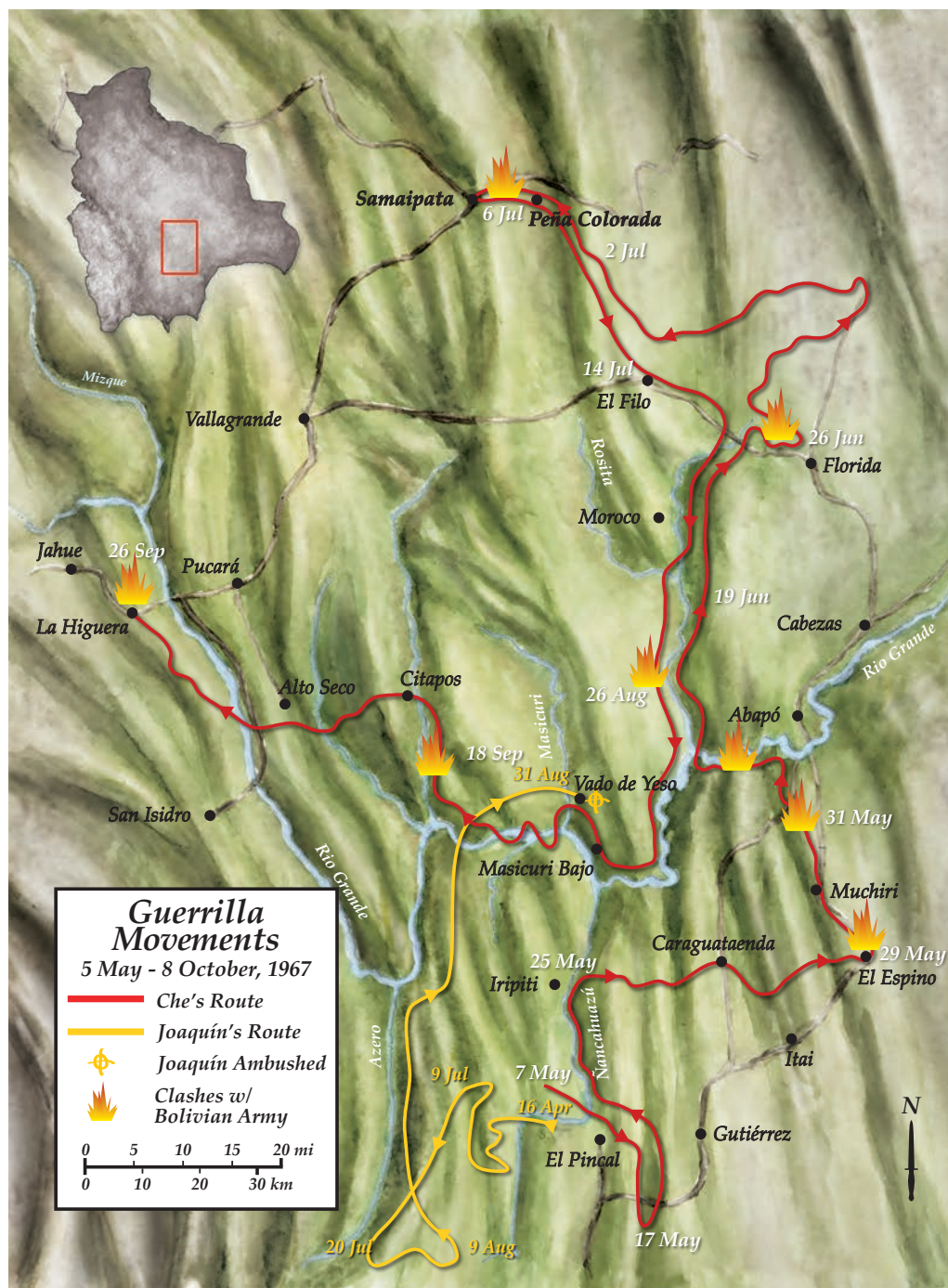
The lack of food and the unrelenting pace over tough terrain began wearing out the entire group. Che ran out of medicine and suffered violent asthmatic attacks, which incapacitated him. He fought a daily battle with



Che Guevara examines a map in Citanos in an attempt to gain intelligence about the Bolivian Army in the area. At this stage of the foco's campaign the peasants probably reported the guerrillas presence as soon as they left the village.

his health. Despite his personal adversity he remained upbeat. In his end of May analysis, Che wrote: "The guerrilla movement is acquiring a powerful morale, which, if well administered, is a guarantee of success."¹⁸ The June analysis, bolstered by several small military successes was: "The legend of the guerrilla movement continues to grow. Now we are super-men guerrillas."¹⁹ Although there were no recruits, Guevara believed the propaganda effect of his *foco* would convince the peasants that the revolution was gaining momentum.²⁰

While Che was deluding himself, the international media frenzy generated by Régis Debray and Ciro Bustos sealed his fate. Debray and Bustos were moved from Camiri to isolation in La Esperanza. Both proved to be intelligence bonanzas, providing detailed information on the *foco*. Debray's mother and father came to plead his case in person. American journalists and intellectuals called for Debray's release on the grounds that he was a correspondent for Mexico's *Sucesos para todos* and the French publisher *Maspero*.²¹ The widows and children of slain Bolivian soldiers petitioned the president to reinstate the death penalty (abolished in January 1967).²² The President of France, Charles de Gaulle, demanded that President René Barrientos convene a "special tribunal" for Debray because of his "intellectual" status.²³ Barrientos testily replied: "It is possible that there in France, and in your generous opinion, he may be considered a young and brilliant university student. Unfortunately here, in Bolivia, we know him only as a meddling subversive gravely implicated in the assassination of twenty-seven soldiers, civilians, and officers of our armed forces, and as a theoretician of violence aimed at destroying institutional order."²⁴ The guerrilla groups gathered around transistor



The two guerrilla bands meandered throughout the area looking for each other. Ironically when Joaquín's rearguard is ambushed and destroyed on 31 August, they were within one or two days of bumping into Che's vanguard element.

radios to listen to the news. Several times Che commented that "Debray is talking too much."²⁵

Despite the food shortages and personnel losses in June, Che decided to raid Samaipata, almost 80 miles north of Ñancahuazú. The guerrillas blocked the Cochabamba-Santa Cruz highway on the night of 6 July. After stopping several vehicles and detaining the passengers, a six-man element piled into a truck and headed into Samaipata for supplies. At 11:45 PM they pulled into a truck stop and surprised the police chief, Lieutenant Vacaflor, two policemen, and an Army sergeant at the snack stand.

The captured police, the sergeant, and the patrons were stunned when the guerrillas bought them cold drinks. Four guerrillas then marched Lieutenant Vacaflor and the sergeant at gunpoint to the schoolhouse where the Army squad was temporarily billeted. A short firefight ended with one killed, and nine more prisoners. While two guerrillas guarded the squad, the remaining two guerrillas bought food and searched the local pharmacy for medical supplies. Then they loaded the supplies and prisoners into the truck and sped out of town. A few miles from town the prisoners were unloaded and forced to strip off their clothes, before being released. The six guerrillas continued on in the truck, to meet the rest of the force. The reunited *foco* quickly fled southward on foot.²⁶

The raid was a publicity coup for the guerrillas, which made national and international headlines. "The action took place before the whole village and many travelers in such a way that the news spread like fire," wrote Che.²⁷ To cover their ineptitude both the mayor and Lieutenant Vacaflor claimed that the famous Che Guevara had led a huge raiding force into town. Although the "eyewitness" reports were wildly exaggerated, the display of operational arrogance by the guerrillas demeaned President Barrientos and the Army. The media proclaimed that the guerrillas were overrunning the southeast and had cut the country's major east-west highway between Cochabamba and Santa Cruz.²⁸

Since President Barrientos could not convince Major Shelton to prematurely commit the Rangers, the Army had to get troops into the region. The Samaipata raid demonstrated that the Army's tactics were not working. The small isolated garrisons had no radios and communicated with their headquarters using either telephones or the telegraph, both of which were unreliable under the best circumstances. Once these lines were cut

by the guerrillas, they could not call for help from a motorized reserve. More and larger composite units were quickly formed and moved into the towns near the "Red Zone," to cut off access to food. To counter the guerrillas, the Army launched two offensives. The 4th Division in Camiri immediately launched "Operation Cynthia" to aggressively patrol south of the Río Grande River. As they fled northward during July and August to the Río Grande, Joaquín's group periodically clashed with these 4th Division patrols. The 8th Division in Santa Cruz did not launch its offensive, "Operation Parabano," until early August, patrolling north of the river.²⁹

Except for getting a few supplies, no particular military objective was accomplished.³⁰ Ironically, the raiders did not accomplish their main task; they did not find Che's asthma medication.³¹ Since Joaquín had medical supplies, the vanguard had to find the rearguard. But following the Samaipata raid, Che's group moved southwest while Joaquín's unit traveled northwest. The two forces would never meet.

Nearing the end: 7 July – September 1967

While Che's force raided Samaipata, Joaquín was trying to move his detachment back into the Ñancahuazú area, as elements of the 4th Division doggedly pursued them. Morale problems plagued the rear guard. Many of the Bolivians were disenchanted with the hardships and dangers of life as a revolutionary. On 9 July, the Army surprised Joaquín's guerrillas while they rested in Iquirá Canyon. Forced to flee, they left behind a number of documents: a unit roster, photographs, and a codebook. The next day the soldiers found the guerrillas and attacked again, killing a Bolivian.³² As Joaquín's rearguard fled northward with the army in close pursuit, two of the "discharged dregs," Chingolo and Eusebio, deserted and

The Press Followed Che & His Posse



The Bolivian national press covered the guerrilla campaign from beginning to end. The coverage intensified as foreign guerrillas were identified, but there was a media frenzy when Régis Debray and Ciro Bustos were captured.

surrendered. They subsequently led the soldiers to some of the hidden Ñancahuazú supply caches.³³

As Joaquín fled south, Che was moving southeast towards Florida and Moroco. On 27 and 30 July, Che's vanguard clashed with Army patrols. Both sides suffered casualties, but the guerrillas were being attrited – two dead and one wounded. More significantly, during the confusion of the second fight, Che's group lost eleven rucksacks with critical food, medicine, and ammunition. Most critical was the loss of their tape recorder to collect coded messages from Cuba.³⁴ Their isolation was now almost complete. The short wave radio had been broken during movement and could only receive. Che had to admit in his July analysis that "the negative aspects of last month prevail." The vanguard, now reduced from the original 31 to 22, made a final attempt to find Joaquín.³⁵

Meanwhile, Joaquín's group now turned north to the Rio Grande, continuing to look for Che. At the home of Honorato Rojas, Joaquín bought food and asked where the best fording site across the Río Grande was. The peasant explained that it was possible to wade across the river at El Vado del Yeso.³⁶ Joaquín asked Rojas to mark the fording site with a white flag if it was safe to cross, or with a red flag if it was not. Rojas agreed and crossed the ford. Once on the other side, he set up the white flag. Safe across the river Rojas ran to an Army patrol base to tell the commander, Captain Mario Vargas Salinas, about the guerrillas' plan.³⁷ Captain Vargas quickly moved his 41-man force to El Vado del Yeso.

Just before dusk on 31 August 1967, Joaquín's group appeared at the ford. Seeing Rojas' white marker, they did not secure the opposite bank, but began to slowly wade across the ford in a file. When the majority of the guerrillas were in the water Vargas sprang the ambush from both banks of the river. Most the group, including

Tania, Joaquín, Moisés Guevara, and Braulio, were killed in the opening salvo. The lone survivor, "Paco," one of the "dregs," was captured and immediately cooperated with the Army.³⁸ It would be days before Che learned about the disaster.

Ironically during August, Che had turned southwest towards the Río Grande River. Desperate for his asthma medicine he sent a small patrol to Ñancahuazú to get some from the supply caches. Shortly after the patrol departed, he heard on a transistor radio that two deserters from Joaquín's group had led the army to the original campsite.³⁹ The Bolivian soldiers discovered Che's medicine, as well as documents, several rolls of film, and weapons. The news was a severe blow to his morale. "Now I am condemned to suffer asthma for an indefinite period. It [the loss of medicine] is the hardest blow they have given us."⁴⁰ He was so weak that he had to ride a pack mule.

Hunger and thirst plagued them in the inhospitable terrain north of the Río Grande. They ate anything they could find. "They [the hunters] caught a condor and a rotten cat. Everything was eaten together with the last piece of the anteater meat. I am quite ravenous," lamented Che.⁴¹ The patrol sent to the cache sites returned empty handed, but they had current intelligence on the Army. The *foco*, now reduced to 22, needed every man. Unaware of the destruction of Joaquín, Che summarized August as "without a doubt, the worst month we have had so far in this war." The usual optimism and confidence was missing. But the demoralized and exhausted vanguard continued forward.⁴²

After clashes with Bolivian army patrols on 3 and 6 September near Masicuri Bajo, Che and his men moved back to the northwest. En route to the village of Alto Seco, the guerrillas were jolted by two radio broadcasts.

The remnants of the foco crossing the Río Grande River in mid-September 1967. Che Guevara is third from the right, without a rucksack. Every river crossing meant added risk for the fatigued guerrillas.



One detailed the ambush of Joaquín's group. The second announced the arrest of 16 members of the La Paz support network. The documents and photographs collected by Bolivia's intelligence service, police, and army had finally paid off.⁴³ More bad news for the guerrillas was yet to come.

Unknown to Che and the vanguard, the Ranger Battalion was ready to join the fight. On 15 September 1967, the 2nd Ranger Battalion completed the 19-week counter-insurgency training provided by the 8th Special Forces Group Mobile Training Team.⁴⁴ After the 17 September graduation ceremony the battalion would be sent to the 8th Division's area to hunt down the remaining guerrillas.⁴⁵ By then, the guerrilla threat had lost most of its potency.

The dejected remnants of the *foco* finally reached La Higuera, near the Río Grande River, on 26 September. As they entered the village, Che noticed that it was nearly deserted, except for a few women. While securing the telegraph office, Coco Peredo found a telegram warning the mayor that the guerrillas were in the area. As the guerrillas fled, an Army unit ambushed them just outside of town. In their efforts to escape annihilation, they lost three men, all killed, including the invaluable Coco, one of the few Bolivian leaders.⁴⁶ Che summarized September as a repeat of August, except that the peasants refused to help and were "turning into informers."⁴⁷

Of the three *foco* elements, two were effectively neutralized. The Debray-Bustos case was slowly moving along through the court (it would last until November).⁴⁸ The trial had brought negative international attention to Bolivia. President Barrientos and the Army leadership dreaded a repetition of the international leftist sympathy for Che Guevara if he was captured. Some Army officers feared that another highly publicized trial would rally dissident factions in Bolivia to mount another revolt.⁴⁹ The elimination of Joaquín's force had given the Army and the government a large morale boost. The Bolivian Army that Che had considered the worst in South America had proved better than he thought and was about to send an elite counterinsurgency force to deliver the *coup de grace*. ▲

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Che poses with his mule Chico in September 1967. Ill from the effects of asthma and malnutrition he could no longer endure the pace and had to ride to keep up with the vanguard.

Endnotes

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- 2 Daniel James, *Che Guevara* (New York: Stein and Day, 1969), 204; Richard Harris, *Death of a Revolutionary, Che Guevara's Last Mission*. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1970), 77; According to Daniel James the fake Bolivian press credentials were obtained by Tania through her network of "fellow travelers." That included President Barrientos' brother in law, Marcelo Galindo, in the Ministry of Press and Information (James, *Guevara*, 204; Harris, *Che Guevara's Last Mission*, 77; Jon Lee Anderson, *Che Guevara, A Revolutionary Life* (New York: Grove Press, 1997), 765.
- 3 Ryan, *The Fall of Che Guevara*, 73; Gary Prado Salmón (trans by John Deredita), *The Defeat of Che Guevara* (New York: Praeger, 1987), 88–89.
- 4 Ernesto Guevara, edited by Daniel James, *The Complete Bolivian Diaries of Che Guevara and Other Captured Documents* (New York: Stein and Day, 1968), 152.
- 5 Prado, *The Defeat of Che Guevara*, 94–100.
- 6 Harris, *Che Guevara's Last Mission*, 94–96; Ignacio, *Guevara, Also Known as Che*, 519; "Unwitting Betrayal," *Time*, 24 November 1967, online article, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/0,9171,844152,00.html>; "Operation Cynthia," *Time*, 28 July 1967, online article, <http://www.time.com/printout/0,8816,837099,00.html>; Jean Lartéguy (translated by Stanley Hochman), *The Guerrillas* (New York: Signet Publishing, 1972), 219.
- 7 Harris, *Che Guevara's Last Mission*, 95–97; Prado, *The Defeat of Che Guevara*, 95–97.
- 8 Inti Peredo, "My Campaign with Che," in Ernesto Che Guevara, edited by Mary-Alice Waters, *The Bolivian Diary of Ernesto Che Guevara* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1994), 368.

- 9 James, *Diaries*, 151 and 144; James, *Guevara*, 254-255; in that ambush.
- 10 James, *Guevara*, 222-227 and 248-249; **If one counts the combatants there are 21 foreigners, 20 Bolivians, and the 4 Bolivian "discharged dregs," as Che called them.**
- 11 James, *Diaries*, 43 and 131; **Paco is José Castillo Chávez, Pepe is Julio Velasco Montana, Chingolo is Hugo Choque Silva, and Eusebio is Eusebio Tapia Aruni. Note: The exact numbers in Joaquín's rearguard still vary, with numbers from ten to seventeen; Inti Peredo, "My Campaign with Che," in Guevara, *The Bolivian Diary of Ernesto Che Guevara*, 367.**
- 12 James, *Diaries*, 143; Harris, *Che Guevara's Last Mission*, 105; Inti Peredo, "My Campaign with Che," in Guevara, *The Bolivian Diary of Ernesto Che Guevara*, 369; Prado, *The Defeat of Che Guevara*, 85-86.
- 13 James, *Diaries*, 152; James, *Guevara*, 255-257.
- 14 Harris, *Che Guevara's Last Mission*, 106-109.
- 15 James, *Diaries*, 146-147; Prado, *The Defeat of Che Guevara*, 90-91.
- 16 James, *Diaries*, 156; Prado, *The Defeat of Che Guevara*, 92-93.
- 17 James, *Diaries*, 155-156, 163-164, 173-174.
- 18 James, *Diaries*, 164.
- 19 James, *Diaries*, 176.
- 20 James, *Diaries*, 176.
- 21 Ryan, *The Fall of Che Guevara*, 71; "Letter to the Government of the Bolivian Republic on the behalf of Régis Debray," *The New York Review of Books*, Volume 9, number 1, 13 July 1967, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/12024>; Prado, *The Defeat of Che Guevara*, 95-99.
- 22 Prado, *The Defeat of Che Guevara*, 97.
- 23 Lartéguy, *The Guerrillas*, 223.
- 24 Prado, *The Defeat of Che Guevara*, 99-100.
- 25 James, *Diaries*, 175-176.
- 26 Prado, *The Defeat of Che Guevara*, 136-137.
- 27 James, *Diaries*, 179-180.
- 28 James, *Guevara*, 262-263.
- 29 John D. Waghelstein, "A Theory of Revolutionary Warfare and its Application to the Bolivian Adventure of Che Guevara," (Master's Thesis, Cornell University, 1973), 87.
- 30 James, *Guevara*, 262-263.
- 31 James, *Diaries*, 179-180.
- 32 James, *Guevara*, 264-265; Prado, *The Defeat of Che Guevara*, 100-101.
- 33 Harris, *Che Guevara's Last Mission*, 112-113; Prado, *The Defeat of Che Guevara*, 144-145.
- 34 James, *Diaries*, 77 and 189-190.
- 35 James, *Diaries*, 190.
- 36 Harold T. Carpenter, 8th Special Forces Group, telephone interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 29 October 2008, Las Vegas, NV, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 37 Carpenter interview, 29 October 2008. **This was a composite unit hurriedly thrown together from the NCO School in Cochabamba. It had two officers, three NCOs, three NCO candidates, seventeen soldiers from the 12th Infantry Regiment, and sixteen from the 8th Cavalry Group.** Prado, *The Defeat of Che Guevara*, 151; James, *Diaries*, 48-50.
- 38 Harris, *Che Guevara's Last Mission*, 119-120; Anderson, *Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life*, 724-726; Ryan, *The Fall of Che Guevara*, 118-120; **The Bolivian, "Paco," José Catillo Chavez, was one of the "discharged dregs." There are reports that a second guerrilla survived the river ambush, Freddy ("Ernesto") Maymura. He was supposedly shot by the soldiers after he surrendered,** Anderson, *Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life*, 724-725; Prado, *The Defeat of Che Guevara*, 150-152.
- 39 Prado, *The Defeat of Che Guevara*, 149.
- 40 James, *Diaries*, 195.
- 41 James, *Diaries*, 199.
- 42 James, *Diaries*, 202.
- 43 Harris, *Che Guevara's Last Mission*, 122; Prado, *The Defeat of Che Guevara*, 165.
- 44 James, *Guevara*, 277.
- 45 James, *Guevara*, 279-280.
- 46 James, *Guevara*, 268-269.
- 47 James, *Diaries*, 219-220.
- 48 "Unwitting Betrayal," *Time*, 24 November 1967, online article, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/0,9171,844152,00.html>.
- 49 Harris, *Che Guevara's Last Mission*, 128-129; Anderson, *Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life*, 736-737.



A Bolivian Army unit searches the Ñancahuazú guerrilla camp #1. The Army kept the area under surveillance in case the foco attempted to return. The Army discovered hidden supply caches as late as August 1967.



By September 1967 battery-powered commercial transistor radios were the guerrillas' only link with the outside world.



Many of the villages the foco passed through were just a collection of thatched huts. The guerrillas, while suspicious of the peasants, needed food to survive.



The 2nd Ranger Battalion and the Capture of Che Guevara

By Kenneth Finlayson

On 26 September 1967, the ragged band of 22 insurgents led by Ernesto “Che” Guevara, entered the small hilltop town of La Higuera above the Rio Grande in Bolivia’s Cochabamba Province. Finding the town deserted except for a handful of old women, Che discovered that the Bolivian authorities knew his presence in the area when he found a telegram to the village mayor warning of his approach. When the sick, dispirited guerrillas left the village, the Bolivian Army ambushed them, killing three men. The guerrillas fled two kilometers to the west, into the rugged, broken canyons leading down to the river.¹ (Two Bolivian guerrillas deserted during the move into the canyons). This article will look at the final episode in Che’s Bolivian adventure when he is captured on 8 October by the 2nd Rangers.

Following the graduation ceremony on 19 September 1967, the Bolivian Army’s 2nd Ranger Battalion departed the 8th Infantry Division headquarters at Santa Cruz.

The troops were loaded to capacity on stake bed sugar cane trucks. The battalion was headed for the *Zona Rosa*, the “Red Zone” along the Rio Grande near the town of Vallegrande. This was the reported area of operation of the band of guerrillas led by Che Guevara. The battalion’s mission was to destroy the insurgents.

The 650-man 2nd Ranger Battalion was Bolivian President René Barrientos Ortuño’s response to the guerrilla attacks in March 1967. Barrientos directed the creation of the unit and asked the United States for assistance in training. A 16-man Mobile Training Team (MTT) from the 8th Special Forces Group in the Canal Zone, Panama, under the command of Major (MAJ) Ralph W. Shelton arrived in April. Over the course of nineteen weeks, the team turned the untrained conscripts into “the best-trained unit in the Bolivian Army.”² Within two weeks of their graduation, the Rangers lived up to that assessment.



The training of the 2nd Ranger Battalion was hard and realistic. When the battalion finished training, they were immediately committed to seek out and destroy Che's guerrilla band.



MAJ Ralph W. Shelton and MTT-BL 404-67X trained using an arduous 19-week program to turn the new recruits into an effective combat unit.



The ravines running into the Rio Grande provided the cover for Che's guerrilla band when it was ambushed leaving La Higuera. The steep ravines and thick vegetation made movement extremely difficult.



The Bolivian Rangers, equipped with M1919A6 machineguns and 3.5 inch rocket launchers, routed Che's forces in El Churo Canyon.

Since late June, Che and his now seventeen-man force were under constant pressure from the Bolivian Army. His original force had been divided and decimated in contacts with the Bolivian Army. Forced into constant movement, shortages of food, medicine and equipment had worn the guerrillas down and caused several desertions. Units from the Bolivian Army's 4th and 8th Divisions cordoned off the area north and south of the Rio Grande and gradually surrounded the guerrillas. The terrain had rolling hills with deep, densely wooded, thorn infested ravines that generally ran north to south. Narrow riverbanks sporadically disappeared into the canyon walls. The canyon sides were covered with dense thickets of reeds, trees, vines, and cacti. Hilltops were largely barren except for small trees and scrub vegetation.³ In the rough, broken terrain of deep ravines and thick vegetation, the Army could not find the guerrillas. Che and his men continued to move, seeking a way to break out of the encirclement.

After the 2nd Ranger Battalion was trucked to Vallegrande on 26 September, Colonel Joaquín Zenteno Anaya, the 8th Division commander, sent Company B (Captain Gary Prado Salmón) in pursuit of the guerrillas that fled La Higuera.⁴ Prado's men rode to the village of Pucará and marched through the night to take up positions at the southern entrance of San Antonio Canyon. By 30 September the insurgents were bottled up. Che and his forces were given a brief respite as Army troops conducted thorough sweeps along the Rio Grande, but did not venture into the narrow canyons.

Company B searched along the north and south banks of the Rio Grande until October 4th when they set up a patrol base near Abra del Pichaco at the mouth of San Antonio Canyon. Two sections (platoons) from A Company (Captain Celso Torrelío) were attached to Prado's company and positioned near La Higuera. Prado now had 200 Rangers under his command. The remainder of Torrelío's company was given the mission of combing the ravines to the east of San Antonio Canyon. The Ranger companies continued searching the area without success until 8 October. Then, a crucial piece of intelligence was received.

That morning (8 October) at 6:30 am, Second Lieutenant Carlos Perez, the First Section (Platoon) Leader in Company A (attached to B Company), reported that Pedro Peña, a local *campesino*, watched seventeen men skirt his potato field to enter El Churo Canyon the evening before.⁵ Perez contacted Prado on his AN/PRC-6 radio and was directed to move the two A Company sections to the north end



Che and his men fled from La Higuera into the San Antonio Canyon complex between the village and the Rio Grande.
Map by D. Telles

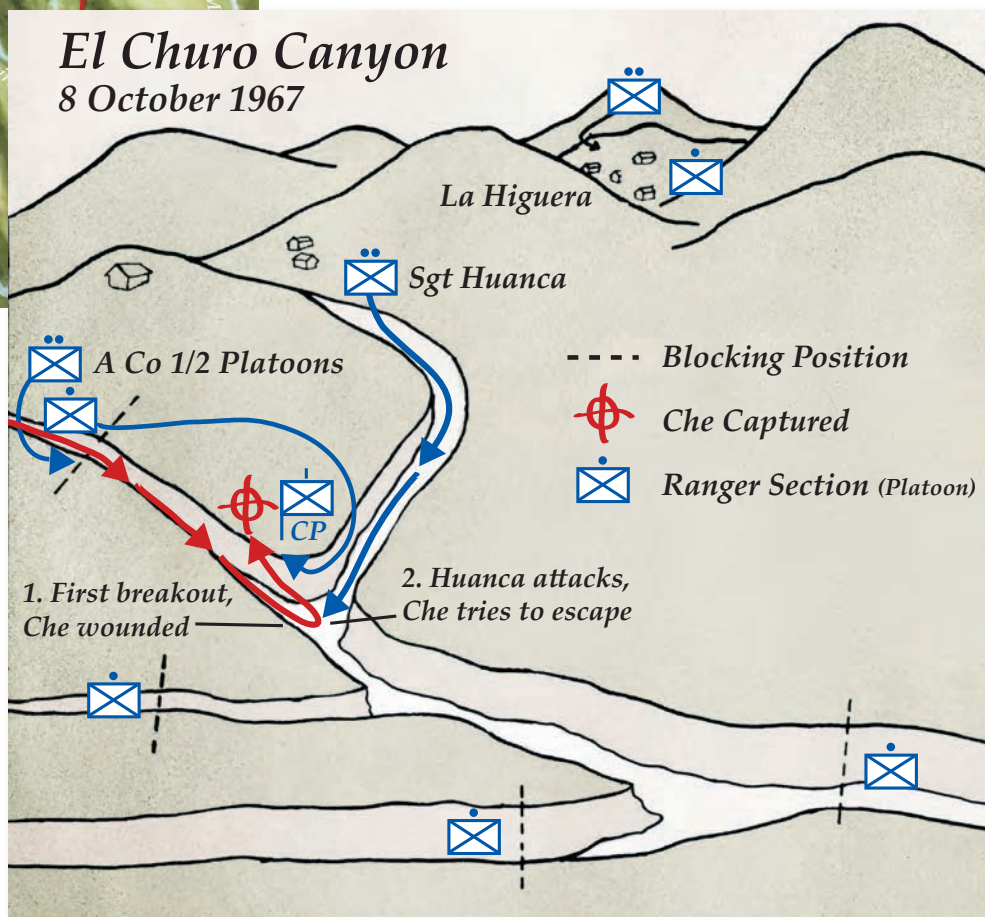
of El Churo Canyon while Prado positioned himself with one rifle section, two 60 mm mortars and one Browning M1919A6 .30 cal machine gun on the high ground overlooking the south end of the small ravine. The Ranger company immediately began to close off the ends of the canyon. The net around Che's posse was closing.

El Churo Canyon, about 300 meters long, ran downhill northeast to southwest. At the southern end, it merged with La Tusca Canyon and fed into San Antonio Canyon. The steep ravine, as much as 200 meters deep, was thickly vegetated, particularly along the canyon floor, becoming sparser near the top. In addition to the two sections from A Company at the top of El Churo Canyon, Captain Prado sent his Third Section (Sergeant Huanca) up to the north end of La Tusca. He set up his command post and established a blocking position with his two mortars and single machine gun at the southern confluence of the two canyons.⁶ By 12:30 pm, Prado's elements were in position and the search of the canyons began.

Che had split his force into three groups, sending four men (Pombo, Inti, Darío, and Ñato) forward into the upper part of El Churo Canyon and four others to the

southerly confluence of the two canyons. The rear guard (Chapaco, Moro, Pablo, and Eustaquio) slipped out before the Rangers got into position. Che stayed hidden in the center of El Churo with the remaining guerrillas. His intent was to block the troops from entering the canyon and escape with his main body by climbing to the high ground. The Ranger forces began searching the canyons, closing in on Che. Immediately there was contact at the north end of El Churo.

Second Lieutenant Perez' men were taken under fire when they began to cautiously enter the north end of El Churo. Two Rangers were killed in the initial exchange. The movement halted as the Rangers tried



Captain Gary Prado's positioning of his platoons. SGT Huanca's section advanced into El Churo canyon. While attempting to escape, Che is captured near Prado's command post.

to maneuver to take the insurgents under fire. They had cut off movement to the high ground from the north end of El Churo, but could not penetrate down the narrow ravine. Prado called Sergeant Huanca on the radio and told him to rapidly clear La Tusca and get to the canyon confluence. Before the Rangers arrived, Che made his first attempt to break out.

Captain Prado had positioned his crew-served weapons to overwatch the area where El Churo and La Tusca canyons converged. When the guerrillas emerged to begin their breakout, he engaged them with mortar and machine gun fire. The guerrillas retreated back

into El Churo with casualties. Che was wounded in the right calf, and his M-1 carbine was destroyed.⁷ A second breakout attempt resulted in another wounded guerrilla. The tide of battle began to run against the guerrillas.

Prado used his AN/PRC-10 radio to call in his appraisal of the encounter to 8th Division Command Post (CP) at Vallegrande. Two North American AT-6 Texan airplanes carrying napalm bombs and armed with machine guns were launched from Santa Cruz to assist. The narrow, near vertical canyon walls and the close proximity of friendlies precluded using the close air support. An OH-23 helicopter also arrived at Prado's CP to help with the evacuation of dead and wounded Rangers.⁸ The restricted maneuver room meant that it would be an infantry slugfest at point blank range.

Sergeant Huanca and his section, having completed their sweep of La Tusca Canyon, were directed into El Churo to drive the guerrillas against the two sections of A Company atop the ravine in a "hammer and anvil" maneuver. Huanca courageously attacked Che's main body with hand grenades, killing two guerrillas. This forced the insurgents to fall back and enabled the Rangers to get into the canyon. Now Che had no choice but to try to escape, and the only way out was up.

Separated from the rest of his men the wounded Che with "Willy" helping him began climbing out of the canyon. Two Rangers manning an observation post near Prado's CP caught sight of the two fleeing guerrillas. They held their fire and stayed hidden, allowing the insurgents to climb up the ravine. When they were ten feet away, the two Rangers stood up and took them prisoner. Che had been caught within 15 meters of the command post.⁹ When asked by Captain Prado to identify himself, he replied, "I am Che Guevara."¹⁰ Prado radioed to the 8th Division CP the news of Che's capture, then turned his attention back to the battle.

The fighting lasted the rest of the afternoon as the Rangers continued to sweep the canyons for insurgents. Che was detained at Prado's CP until dusk, and then he and Willy were marched by their captors the two kilometers to the village school at La Higuera. There they were kept along with the bodies of two other dead guerrillas.

Che and Willy were held through the night of 8 October in the schoolhouse at La Higuera. The next morning, on orders from the Bolivian President, they were executed by Bolivian troops.¹¹ In the fighting that lasted until 14 October, the Rangers had nine men killed in action and four wounded. Of Che's force, eleven were killed, one captured, and five (three Cubans and two Bolivians) escaped into Chile.¹²

Of Che's guerrilla band that once numbered more than fifty, only five survived. Che's dream of starting "one, two, many Vietnams" in the jungles of Bolivia died in El Churo Canyon under the guns of the Rangers. Major Ralph Shelton, commander of the MTT who trained them, summed up Che's end "Che was trapped by and tried to break through the best platoon in the best company in the Ranger Battalion, Gary Prado's B Company and the 3rd Platoon commanded by Sergeant Huanca."¹³ ▲

Kenneth Finlayson is the USASOC Deputy Command Historian. He earned his PhD from the University of Maine, and is a retired Army officer. Current research interests include Army special operations during the Korean War, special operations aviation, and World War II special operations units.

Endnotes

- 1 Gary Prado Salmón, *The Defeat of Che Guevara: Military Response to Guerrilla Challenge in Bolivia*, (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1987), 172-173. **Retired Major General Gary Prado Salmón commanded B Company, 2nd Ranger Battalion. His book is an eyewitness account of the events surrounding Che's capture.**
- 2 Mobile Training Team BL 404-67X, 8th Special Forces Group, "Report of Mobile Training Team to Bolivia (RCS CSGPO-125)," 10 December 1967, page 2, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 3 Daniel James, *Che Guevara* (New York: Stein and Day, 1969), 214; Richard Harris, *Death of a Revolutionary, Che Guevara's Last Mission*. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1970), 77.
- 4 Prado, *The Defeat of Che Guevara: Military Response to Guerrilla Challenge in Bolivia*, 173.
- 5 Prado, *The Defeat of Che Guevara: Military Response to Guerrilla Challenge in Bolivia*, 174.
- 6 Prado, *The Defeat of Che Guevara: Military Response to Guerrilla Challenge in Bolivia*, 175.
- 7 Prado, *The Defeat of Che Guevara: Military Response to Guerrilla Challenge in Bolivia*, 176-177.
- 8 Prado, *The Defeat of Che Guevara: Military Response to Guerrilla Challenge in Bolivia*, 176-177.
- 9 Prado, *The Defeat of Che Guevara: Military Response to Guerrilla Challenge in Bolivia*, 177-178.
- 10 Prado, *The Defeat of Che Guevara: Military Response to Guerrilla Challenge in Bolivia*, 177.
- 11 Prado, *The Defeat of Che Guevara: Military Response to Guerrilla Challenge in Bolivia*, 1182-183. **The media frenzy surrounding Ciro Bustos and his captured French cohort Régis Debray forced the hand of the Bolivian President. With no death penalty in Bolivia, a trial and imprisonment would have created an impossible situation for the Bolivian government. Present at the time of his execution was another United States Government person. Felix I. Rodriguez and John Weisman, *Shadow Warrior: The CIA Hero of a Hundred Unknown Battles* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989).**
- 12 Prado, *The Defeat of Che Guevara: Military Response to Guerrilla Challenge in Bolivia*, 257-265.
- 13 Ralph W. Shelton, letter to John D. Waghelstein, 1972, reprinted in "How the Green Berets Got Che!" *Eagle*, September 1985, reprint in the USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.



The Special Forces Mission to Cochabamba, Bolivia 1967

by Charles H. Briscoe

In the summer of 1967, after MTT-BL 404-67X deployed to Bolivia to organize and train a Ranger Battalion at La Esperanza, the MILGP sent two personnel TDY to Cochabamba for 179 days to serve as advisors to the Airborne Battalion and Parachute School. The officer would also teach COIN (counterinsurgency) classes to Bolivian lieutenants and captains in *la Escuela de Armas* (The Combat Arms School) and the sergeant would instruct aspiring noncommissioned officers (NCOs) at the fledgling NCO Academy. Major (MAJ) John D. Waghelstein (who later commanded USMILGP-El Salvador and 7th SFG) and Master Sergeant (MSG) Gustavo Fabian were sent to fill those assignments. Since the Bolivian paratroopers could help a *coup d'état*, they were based far from the capitol of La Paz like the Rangers were. The two SF worked for Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Joseph P. Rice, the head of the MILGP detachment in Cochabamba and project officer for the Rangers.¹ That Cochabamba element twice sent Sergeant First Class (SFC) Del Toro, to La Esperanza to teach vehicle maintenance to the Rangers and give driver training to a select few. Since the 8th Division issued insufficient fuel for the few trucks assigned, that effort was futile.² The only contact that MAJ Waghelstein and MSG Fabian had with the SF on the Ranger Battalion training MTT was supporting proficiency jumps to keep their parachute pay from being stopped.³ The Cochabamba assignment was not very demanding. Simply monitoring the progress of the Bolivian Army against Che Guevara and his guerrillas eventually proved too tempting for the two advisors when the Airborne Battalion was alerted to assist.⁴

MAJ Waghelstein and MSG Fabian arranged for a truck and a Bolivian paratroop sergeant to drive them, and the trio headed south towards the "Red Zone." Though they had an AN/PRC-10 radio, it proved useless in the mountainous terrain. Armed with a variety of foreign weapons, Waghelstein carried an Israeli Uzi submachinegun. The narrow "highway" from Cochabamba to Santa Cruz dated to the 1930s Chaco War. They started at 7,500 feet, climbed the precipitous one and a half lane road to 18,000 feet to cross the mountains, and then abruptly descended to 900 feet in the Amazon headwater region. Learning that some of the

*MAJ John D. Waghelstein near
Vallegrande in the "Red Zone".*



SFC Robert Owens, senior medic, jumped with Bolivian airborne students at Cochabamba. Female parachute riggers always jumped with the students. Their presence eliminated any "jump refusals" by the men.



MAJ John D. Waghelstein, the SF advisor to the Airborne Battalion and Parachute School and COIN instructor at la Escuela de Armas (Combat Arms School) prepares to jump with a group of Bolivian airborne trainees at Cochabamba.

guerrillas had escaped the 8th and 4th Division cordons, the trio studied their map, selected the best egress route to Chile, and headed southeast towards that border.⁵ "We meandered, asking questions and scouting the dirt wagon roads that emptied into our selected egress route. Confident that any locals who had encountered the guerrillas would gladly tell us, we pushed south. It was an adventure for which I would ask forgiveness later. The survivors were evading, and they had several days head start on us. I don't think we ever got closer than a day behind them before they crossed into Chile," said Waghelstein. "Why did we do this? Sometimes you just get a 'wild hair' as all SF soldiers can attest to. That was one of my more exciting 'wild hairs,'" mused the retired colonel.⁶

While MAJ Ralph W. "Pappy" Shelton's men conducted the final field training exercise (FTX) in early September about ten miles south of Santa Cruz along the main highway, they did not accompany the Ranger Battalion when it went operational on 17 September 1967. They had already received another mission and returned to La Esperanza to prepare. The MTT was to provide four weeks of infantry tactics refresher and COIN training to nine separate infantry companies in three iterations.⁷ The only SF personnel that got into the "Red Zone," MAJ John Waghelstein and MSG Gus Fabian, were conducting a reconnaissance for the Bolivian Airborne Battalion that had been alerted to join the hunt for guerrilla escapees. ▲

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Endnotes

1 John D. Waghelstein, telephone interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 12 June 2007, Bristol, RI, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited as Waghelstein interview and date.

MSG Gustavo Fabian studies the map in a small town while MAJ Waghelstein and Bolivian Sergeant Mars ask questions of the locals.



MAJ Waghelstein, MSG Fabian, and Bolivian Sergeant Mars "surveyed" the rugged terrain along the suspected guerrilla egress route.



2 MTT-BL 404-67X, 8th Special Forces Group (Airborne), 1st Special Forces, Special Action Force, Fort Gulick, Canal Zone. SUBJECT: Report of Mobile Training Team to Bolivia (RCS CSGPO-125), 29 June and 29 July 1967, hereafter cited as MTT-BL 404-67X Report with date.

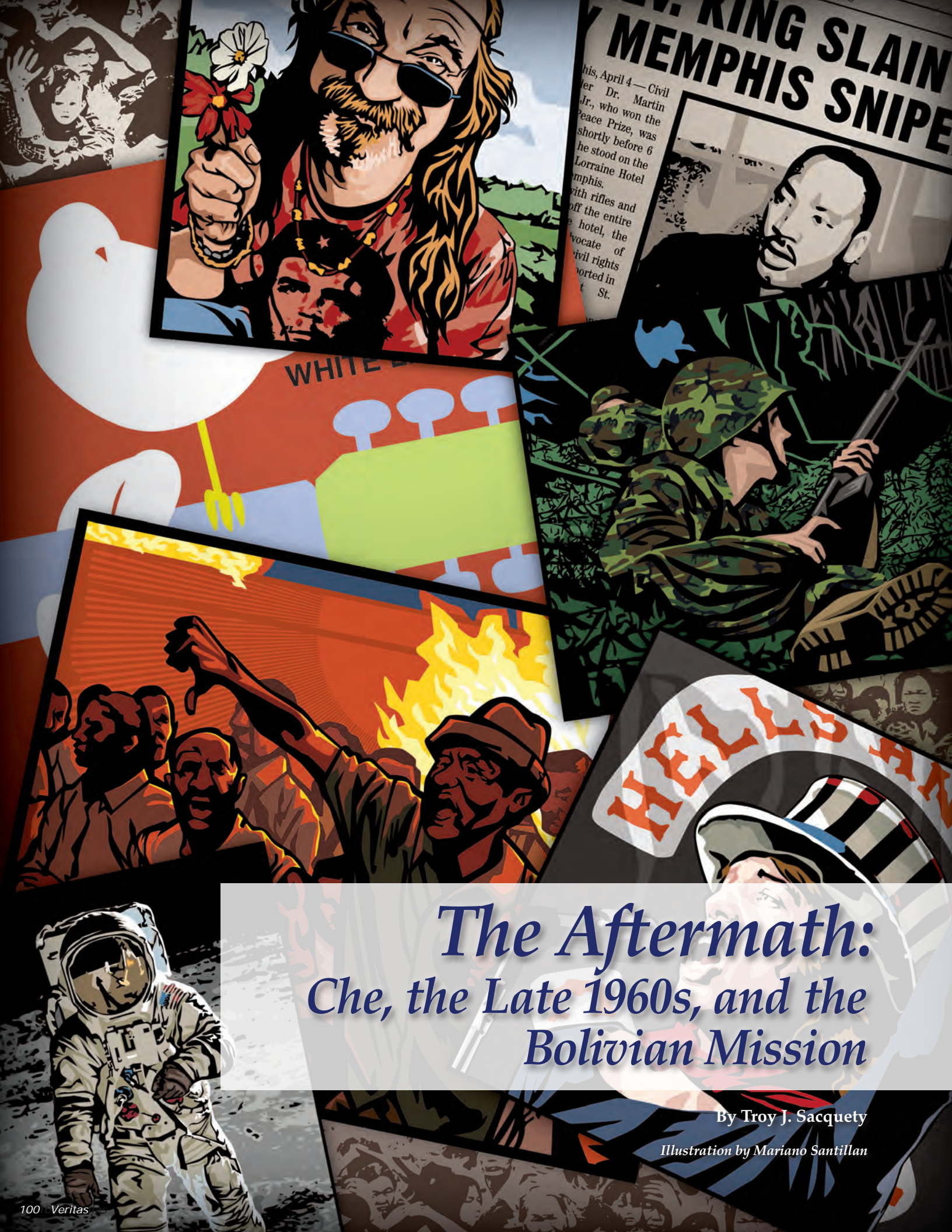
3 Ralph W. Shelton, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 13 April 2007, Sweetwater, TN, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited as Shelton interview with date and MTT-BL 404-67X Reports, 29 July and 1 November 1967.

4 Waghelstein interview, 12 June 2007.

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6 Waghelstein interview, 12 June 2007.

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The Aftermath: Che, the Late 1960s, and the Bolivian Mission

By Troy J. Sacquety

Illustration by Mariano Santillan

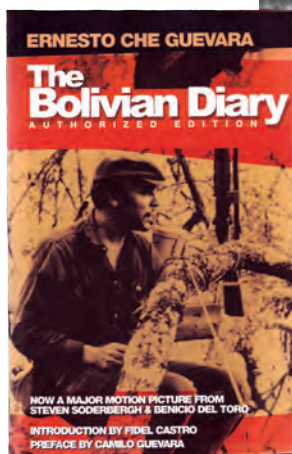
News of the death of Ernesto “Che” Guevara on 9 October 1967 reverberated around the world, but it quickly lost relevance in the maelstrom of other world events. His demise gained more significance many years later when Che’s image became mainstream popular culture. From the perspective of U.S. Army Special Forces, his elimination as an insurgent is attributed to Mobile Training Team MTT-BL 404-67X. The Bolivian mission remains one of the few unqualified strategic COIN successes. This article will briefly explain the immediate reaction to Che’s death, the events in the late 1960s that eclipsed it, how his image was later distorted to that of a revolutionary martyr, and sum up the accomplishments of the 1967 Bolivian MTT.

There was an immediate reaction in Bolivia to Che’s death. Many who saw his body before it disappeared, likened it to that of Jesus Christ. The media scrambled for “first rights” to Che’s diary, because it might be “the most important narrative of the last few years.”¹ Their effort failed because the Minister of Internal Affairs, Antonio Arguedas, was a Cuban sympathizer. He secretly mailed a copy to Havana, where it was immediately published. The revelation that President René Barrientos had a closet Marxist in a top cabinet position threatened to topple the government. Violent demonstrations resulted, and they were the closest Che came to accomplishing his goal in Bolivia. Che’s death spurred protests in the United States as well.

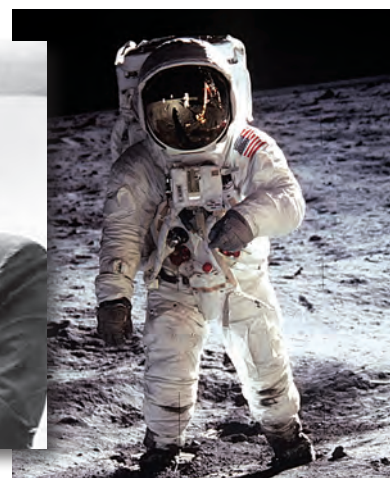
On 11 October 1967, the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, Walt W. Rostow, told President Lyndon B. Johnson that Che was dead. His memo read: “It shows the soundness of our “preventive medicine” . . . it was the Bolivian 2nd Ranger Battalion, trained by our Green Berets . . . that cornered him and got him.”² On 21 October, a crowd of more than 50,000 war protesters gathered in Washington D.C. to show their respect for Che with a moment of silence.³ In Moscow, 200 foreign students demonstrated outside the U.S. Embassy.⁴ But, Che’s downfall quickly became just a “blip” on the Cold War radar screen.

The Vietnam War had gotten America’s attention. In late 1967, the Communist North Vietnamese Army and the insurgent Viet Cong launched the Tet Offensive countrywide. Even though they were dealt a shattering defeat, the Saigon attacks proved to be a major psychological victory for the Communists. The international press corps,

Troops from the 1st Cavalry Division battle North Vietnamese troops in Hue, South Vietnam in 1968. The Tet Offensive shook American’s faith that an end to the war was in sight.



After the death of Che Guevara, the media scrambled to purchase the publication rights to his captured diary. A smuggled copy was printed in Cuba. The original was sealed in the Bolivian Archives.



President John F. Kennedy challenged America to put a man on the moon by the end of the 1960s. Apollo 11, consisting of astronauts Michael Collins, Edwin “Buzz” Aldrin, and Neil A. Armstrong, completed Kennedy’s vision. Capturing the reflection of both himself and the lunar module in Aldrin’s visor, Armstrong took one of the first photographs from the moon’s surface.

housed in hotels in Saigon, were suddenly in “harm’s way.” Americans, watching the war nightly on television, saw the drama unfold. Historian Don Oberdorfer wrote: “the Tet Offensive shocked a citizenry which had been led to believe that success in Vietnam was just around the corner.”⁵ Perhaps the most momentous event of the 1960s—a counter-response to the Soviet initiated space race—shadowed the death of Che Guevara.

On 12 September 1962, President John F. Kennedy explained why America should put a man on the moon; because it was hard, not easy.⁶ President Kennedy’s promise was fulfilled on 20 July 1969, as more than 600 million television watchers saw Apollo 11 astronauts Neil Armstrong and Edwin “Buzz” Aldrin walk on the moon. The triumph marked the best of man’s achievements, while domestic events showcased America’s problems.

The struggle for Civil Rights had turned violent. In mid-1967, a wave of race riots spread across the northern U.S. The largest, in Detroit, began on 23 July 1967. Forty-

three people were killed, hundreds injured, and over 2,500 stores were burned and/or looted. President Johnson quelled the riots with federalized National Guard and the 82nd Airborne Division. On 4 April 1968, Civil Rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee. One of the first to break the news was Senator Robert F. Kennedy, who personally implored Americans not to turn to violence.⁷ His plea was ignored by many. The Washington D.C. riots, starting that night, were the most significant, lasting until 8 April when President Johnson again called in federal troops. Even counter-culture frivolity turned bad in 1969.

The Altamont Free Concert in northern California on 6 December 1969, was promoted as the “Woodstock West,” after the vastly popular festival four months earlier. The violence during Altamont destroyed the counter-culture image. While the *Rolling Stones* were performing the finale, Meredith Hunter approached the stage with a drawn revolver. Members of the Hell’s Angels Motorcycle Club, tasked to provide security, stabbed and kicked Hunter to death in front of the crowd. Unaware of what was happening, the *Stones* continued playing. The counter-culture drug and free-love rock festivals ended soon after. Cuba’s proclamation of Che’s martyrdom went unnoticed by the party-goers, but the Argentine became a symbol of the era.

In a secret 1967 memo, the U.S. Department of State announced that Havana would eulogize Che Guevara “as the model revolutionary who met a heroic death,” and warned that other leftist elements would follow suit.⁸ On 19 October 1967, Fidel Castro delivered a lengthy eulogy praising Che for his sacrifices and encouraged everyone to follow his example.⁹ Memorials were built to honor him. By the time Che’s body was returned to Cuba in July 1997, he had been transformed into a global symbol of revolution, resistance, anarchy. Che’s image had also been commercialized.

Alberto Korda’s 5 May 1960 photograph of Che in Havana, entitled *Guerrillero Heroico*, first reproduced as a print and poster, became emblazoned on clothing as a symbol of popular culture. The British Broadcasting Cooperation (BBC) called it “perhaps the most reproduced, recycled and ripped off image of the 20th Century . . . It began to be used as a decoration for products from tissues to underwear.”¹⁰ “Che” mania became so crazed that a lock of his hair, snipped off his head after death, and other personal effects sold at auction in October 2007 for \$119,500.¹¹ For a dedicated Communist like Che, commercialization was the ultimate insult. Most who wear his image on a T-shirt know little about him and what he represented, and capitalist entrepreneurs have had the last laugh . . . all the way to the bank. One question remains to be answered.

Che’s *foco* theory of guerrilla warfare was largely disproved in Bolivia. The U.S. Department of State determined in 1967 that those attempting to “initiate Cuban-style guerrilla warfare will be discouraged, at least for a time, by the defeat of the foremost tactician of the Cuban revolutionary strategy at the hands of one of



The Detroit Riots exemplify the series of race riots that spread across the U.S. in 1967. They were further inflamed by the assassination of Civil Rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in Memphis, TN, on 4 April 1968. By late 1968, the Civil Rights Movement had left its pacifist roots. At the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City, athletes Tommie Smith and John W. Carlos gave defiant “Black Power” salutes while the American national anthem was played.



The Woodstock Festival, 15-18 August 1968, was noted for its brotherhood and came to exemplify the 1960s counter-culture movement. Meant to be the West Coast version, the Altamont Free Concert became the opposite of Woodstock. Members of the Hell’s Angels Motorcycle Club, hired as security, killed concert-goer Meredith Hunter as the Rolling Stones played their set.

the weakest armies in the hemisphere.”¹² But others tried to adapt his *foco* ideas to fit insurgencies in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, Peru, Colombia, Bolivia, Brazil, and Venezuela.¹³ The Cuban revolutionary model was hard to apply in the rest of Latin America.¹⁴ This was especially true when SF soldiers trained enthusiastic, dedicated, proficient infantrymen to effectively counter insurgency.

The Bolivia mission demonstrated that Special Forces are truly force multipliers. They can have a strategic impact with COIN training. When MTT-BL 404-67X left the Canal Zone to perform their mission they did not know that Che—in modern terms a High Value Target (HVT)—was in Bolivia, only that the country needed help countering a Communist guerrilla threat. They performed this sensitive mission to the highest standards. American training enabled the Bolivian Rangers to capture Che less than two weeks after finishing their course of instruction.

Che was eliminated, his *foco* theory discredited, and Latin American militaries were shown that even the most poorly-resourced armies can defeat Communist insurgencies. This MTT-BL 404-67X forty years ago did what today's Special Forces are trying to do in Afghanistan, Iraq, Colombia, and the Philippines: help their armed forces end insurgency. ♣

Troy J. Sacquety earned an MA from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and his PhD in Military History from Texas A&M University. Prior to joining the USASOC History Office staff he worked several years for the Central Intelligence Agency. Current research interests include Army and Office of Strategic Services (OSS) special operations during World War II, and Special Operations Units in Vietnam.



Alberto Korda's well-known photograph, Guerrillero Heroico, has become a worldwide icon signifying revolution and anarchy. The image has been modified into many forms, not all of which flatter Che. T-Shirts emblazoned with Guerrillero Heroico represent capitalism's appropriation of Che's persona.



Endnotes

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- 2 Walt Rostow, Memorandum for the President, "Death of 'Che' Guevara," 11 October 1967, found online at: www.gwu.edu/~nsaarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB5/che7_1.htm, accessed 21 November 2008.
- 3 Henry Butterfield Ryan, *The Fall of Che Guevara: A Story of Soldiers, Spies, and Diplomats* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1998), 162.
- 4 Lewis H. Diuguid, "Guevara's Stature In Life Grows in Death," *The Washington Post*, January 7, 1968.
- 5 Don Oberdorfer, *Tet!: The Turning Point in the Vietnam War* (New York, New York: De Capo, 1984), xii.
- 6 President John F. Kennedy, "Address at Rice University on the Nation's Space Effort," (speech, Rice University, Houston, TX, 12 September 1962), online at <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Historical+Resources/Archives/Reference+Desk/Speeches/JFK/003POF03SpaceEffort09121962.htm>, accessed 17 October 2008.

MTT-BL 404-67X



Havana has dedicated several memorials to Che, one at the site of his victorious battle at Santa Clara, and another, an iconic version of Guerrillero Heroico on the side of the Ministry of the Interior building, where he formerly worked. In Bolivia the site of Che Guevara's death in La Higuera has become a "pilgrimage" site. Forty years after his death, Che's image still haunts Latin America.



- 7 Robert Kennedy, Statement on the Assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., <http://www.rfkmemorial.org/lifevision/assassinationofmartinlutherkingjr/>, accessed 30 September 2008.
- 8 U.S. Department of State; Director of Intelligence and Research, "Guevara's Death-the Meaning for Latin America," 12 October 1967, found online at: www.gwu.edu/~nsaarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB5/che11_1.htm, accessed 21 November 2008.
- 9 The text of the speech can be found at Foreign Broadcast Information Service, "Fidel Casto Delivers Eulogy on Che Guevara," 19 October 1967, found online at: www.gwu.edu/~nsaarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB5/che13_1.htm, accessed 21 November 2008.
- 10 Stephanie Holmes, "Che: The icon and the ad," BBC News, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7028598.stm>, accessed 6 November 2008.
- 11 Ed Stoddard, "Lock of 'Che's Hair Sold at Dallas Auction," *Reuters News Service*, 26 October 2007, <http://www.reuters.com/article/topNews/idUSN2545861520071026?feedType=RSS&feedName=topsNews>, accessed 4 December 2008.
- 12 U.S. Department of State; Director of Intelligence and Research, "Guevara's Death-the Meaning for Latin America," 12 October 1967, found online at: www.gwu.edu/~nsaarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB5/che11_1.htm, accessed 21 November 2008.
- 13 For the Central American *foco* wars, see William E. Odom, *On Internal War: American and Soviet Approaches to Third World Clients and Insurgents* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1992), 97, 119-120, 122. For the South American *foco* wars, see Robert L. Scheina, *Latin America's Wars: The Age of the Professional Soldier, 1900-2001; Volume Two* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's Inc, 2003), 265-277, 293.
- 14 Georges Fauriol, ed., *Latin American Insurgencies* (Washington D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1988), 135.

Postscript

These thumbnail biographies complete the post-Bolivia mission careers of the MTT-BL 404-67X members interviewed for this article. CHB

MAJ Ralph W. "Pappy" Shelton finished his career at Fort Campbell, KY, by getting the Garrison Command through the Annual IG in 1968; 1968-1980, Memphis, TN, HS JROTC instructor & GI Bill student at Memphis State Univ, BA, Pol Sci (1974), MA Ed (1980); 1980-1994, GS Civilian, Memphis Area Office, Office of Personnel Mgt; 1994, Retired & moved to Sweetwater, TN; 2000-2006, City Commissioner.

MSG Oliverio Gomez was promoted to SGM and rotated in 1968 to Fort Bragg, NC, 7th SFG; 1969-1970, Vietnam, 5th SFG, B Team SGM, Ban Me Thout; 1970-1972, Fort Hunter-Liggett, CA: Retired SGM, 1972 in CA after 30 years service.

MSG Roland J. Milliard returned to 5th SFG in Vietnam in 1969, MSG (E-8); 1970-1971, Panama, 8th SFG, USARSO NCO Academy; Retired MSG, Dec 1971, Fort Devens, MA; 1972-1975, AA Business, Newberry Jr College, BS Business Admin, New Hampshire College; 1975-1990, Purchaser, Giant Telephone Co; 1990-1998, Ovido, FL, Police Academy, Correctional Officer; 1998. Retired in MA.

SFC Daniel V. Chapa went to Vietnam in June 1968, FOB 2, Kontum, Hatchet Force 1SG, Nha Trang, Log Spt Cmd, 5th SFG; 1969-1971, Fort Bragg, USAJFKSWC, Enlisted "Q" Course Instructor; 1971-1973, 1SG, XVIII Abn Corps NCO Academy; 1973, 1SG retired to begin 24-year second career with the U.S. Post Office, Fayetteville, NC, AA Management, Lafayette College; 1997. Retired in NC.

SFC Harold T. Carpenter returned to Vietnam in June 1968, II Corps Mike Force, 5th SFG; May 1969-summer 1970, Ft Bragg, NC, C Co, 6th SFG; 1970-1973, Panama, B Co, 8th SFG, El Sal MTT, OAS Observer Msn-HO/ES border; Dom Rep MTT; 1973-1975, Ft Bragg, MSG, B Co, 2/7th SFG & Bootstrap Campbell College (BA-Sociology); 1975-1978, ROTC Washington & Jefferson College, Washington, PA (MA in Educational Psychology); 1978-1979, SGM Academy; 1979-80, Germany, 3rd Inf Div G-3 SGM; 1980-1984, Germany, 10th SFG, A Co SGM, 1/10th SFG, 10th SFG S-3 SGM; 1983-1984, CSM, Ft Lewis, WA, 3/1st SFG; 1985-2005, Nevada Test Site security; 2005. Retired in NV.

SSG Jerald L. Peterson got out after Bolivia to finish college, re-enlisted in 1968 for SF; SGT, Asst S-3 NCO, D Co, 7th SFG, O&I course; 1969-1970, Vietnam, SSG, B Co, 5th SFG; 1971-1982, Panama, SFC, 8th SFG, AST 3/7th SFG Honduras, Colombia and El Salvador MTs; 1983, SFC retired, finished BS (LATAM Affairs) FSU; 1985-1995 DA Civ, 470th MI GP and DIA, El Sal & Panama; 2008, Iraq, contract O&I Instructor.

SSG James A. Hapka returned to A Co, 8th SFG, MTT Nicaragua before going to Vietnam with SFC Carpenter; 1968-1969, Vietnam, Sr Medic, IV Corps Mike Force, 5th SFG; 1969-1970, Key West, FL, USAJFKSWCS SCUBA Det; 1970-1973, Panama, 8th SFG, Recondo School Instr, USARSA, Sr Medic SCUBA Det; 1973-1974, San Antonio, TX, US Army Physicians Assistant (PA) Class 4; 1974-1975, BS, Cameron University, 1979; CW2 PA Intern, Ft Sill, OK; 1980, CW2 retired began 21 years as PA, Internal Med Clinic, Lawton, OK; March 2001-Dec 2007, Fort Sill, OK, Reynolds Army Hospital ER PA; 2008. Retired in OK.

SSG Wendell P. Thompson, Jr. left Panama for 5th SFG in Vietnam in June 1968; November 1969, 615th MP Co, Long Binh; Jan 1970-Sep 1973, Panama, B Co, 8th SFG, Distinguished Marksman (1971); 1973-1974, Fort Huachuca, AZ, Counter Intelligence Agent course, DLI, Japanese; 1974-1978, Japan, 500th MI Gp; 1978-1981, Panama, 470th MI Gp; 1981-1985, Fort Benning, GA, MSG, Army Marksmanship Unit; 1985-1989, Japan, 500th MI GP; 1989-1993, SGM, Fort Meade, MD, MI & Security Bn, 902nd MI GP; 1993 retired SGM; 1993-2003, Limited Stores Sec Supv & Mgr, Cleveland, OH; 2006-present, Sec Mgr, J.C. Penney Distro Ctr, Cleveland, OH.

SGT Alvin E. Graham returned to Bolivia on leave to marry Dorys Roca. They came back to Panama. She stayed in Phoenix, AZ, while he out-processed from the Army; 1968-1970, Arizona State University, BA Health Education & Spanish; 1970-1972, Phoenix HS teacher; 1972-1975, Heavy Construction foreman; 1975-1977, Phoenix JHS & HS teacher again; 1977-2007, Owner & manager of several construction businesses; 2008. Retired in AZ.

Thank You: This special edition of *Veritas* would not have been possible without the wholehearted support of the Bolivia veterans, and Dorys Graham Roca, Ben Sigg, son of SGT Byron R. Sigg, retired Colonels John D. Waghelstein, and Gary A. "Mickey" Riggs, LTC Luis O. Rodriguez, and Mrs. Shilah Felder, wife of COL Louis F. Felder, former commander, 8th SFG. They provided interviews, official after action reports, briefings, unit orders, personal photo collections, original Bolivian and other Spanish language newspaper and magazine articles that covered the short-lived Cuban-led insurgency, American media coverage, and memorabilia. These contributions have enabled us to not only document the 1967 mission, but to make that history truly personal and more interesting. I would like to extend a sincere thanks from the USASOC History Office. CHB

Notes on Sources

by Troy J. Sacquety

Writing well-documented Special Forces history is difficult because it takes a concerted effort to wade through volumes of subject material. Our “anchors” for *Veritas* are primary sources: photographs, original documents, and interviews. We were lucky to have amassed a large photographic record of Mobile Training Team MTT-BL 404-67X. After Action Reports provided important details which participants forgot over time. Veteran interviews are the most important. Without them, there would be no “voices” in the articles. For all veteran assistance, we thank you. Secondary sources can be problematic.

There is a lot of misinformation surrounding Che Guevara and the Special Forces training mission in Bolivia in 1967. Memoirs, normally written years afterwards, often contain faulty recollections and/or deliberate embellishments of actions. Widely available “popular” histories, designed to appeal to a large audience, usually lack documentation. While engaging, historians cannot rely on writing based on a “trust me” premise. The historian must separate the “wheat from the chaff” and evaluate what can be substantiated and what must be taken “with a grain of salt.”

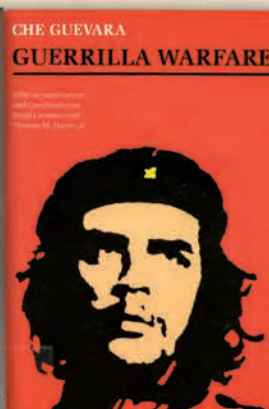
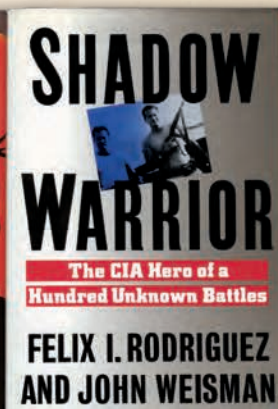
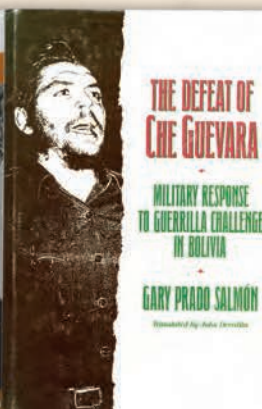
That said, one of the better accounts, written by Bolivian General Gary Prado Salmón, is a day-by-day account of his experiences as the company commander of the Rangers who captured Che.¹ The master’s thesis of John David Waghelstein, *A Theory of Revolutionary Warfare and its Application to the Bolivian Adventure of Che Guevara* offers a solid American perspective. While not on the MTT, he was the Bolivian Airborne Battalion advisor in Cochabamba. His 1973 assessment is more accurate than many of those published later.² Magazine articles in which MTT members are quoted were also valuable.³ Felix Rodriguez’s self-serving account, found in *Shadow Warrior*, offers a CIA officer’s perspective.⁴ Henry Butterfield Ryan’s book, *The Fall of Che Guevara*, is the most objective and thorough account because he got access to declassified documents and interviewed numerous participants.⁵

Trying to understand and explain Che and his *foco* in Bolivia was difficult. The International Left, Cuban Government, and Che’s family, all have

distorted the history to create mythical images of him. Many of Che’s published papers are edited and approved by his widow, Aleida March (the director of the Che Guevara Studies Center in Havana), and the Communist Party of Cuba. While valuable, the reader must be aware of the bias in these accounts that makes deriving “ground truth” difficult. For example, in his forward to *The Bolivian Diary: Authorized Edition*, Che’s son Camilo writes that the Bolivian Rangers were “an entire army trained and financed by the empire [U.S] and its Praetorian rangers.”⁶ This is a pretty distorted polemic description for a 16-man SF MTT that trained one 650-man Ranger Battalion in 19 weeks. Fortunately, some of Che’s discourse, such as *Guerrilla Warfare* and his speeches, are unaltered, but the translations can vary.⁷ Biographies of Che are also problematic; however, Jon Lee Anderson’s, *Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life*, offers a balanced view.⁸ We have conscientiously endeavored to present an objective account of the SF role while avoiding the minefields in current literature.

Endnotes

- 1 Gary Prado Salmón, *The Defeat of Che Guevara: Military Response to Guerrilla Challenge in Bolivia* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1990).
- 2 John David Waghelstein, “A Theory of Revolutionary Warfare and its Application to the Bolivian Adventure of Che Guevara” (Master’s Thesis, Cornell University, 1973). **Colonel (retired) Waghelstein was a former MILGP commander in El Salvador during the war and a Commander of the 7th Special Forces Group.**
- 3 Waghelstein, “Know This, You Are Killing a Man,” *Eagle: For the American Fighting Man* September 1985, 64-74., Andrew St. George, “How the U.S. Got Che,” *True*, April 1969. (photocopy in the USASOC History Office Classified Files).
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- 5 Henry Butterfield Ryan, *The Fall of Che Guevara: A Story of Soldiers, Spies, and Diplomats* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1998).
- 6 Ernesto Che Guevara, *The Bolivian Diary: Authorized Edition*, with an introduction by Fidel Castro and preface by Camilo Guevara (New York, New York: Ocean Press, 2006), 2. **Other examples of Guevara’s writing include Ernesto “Che” Guevara, *The African Dream: The Diaries of the Revolutionary War in the Congo*, with a forward by Aleida March (New York, New York: Grove Press, 1999).**
- 7 Two examples of this translation are Che Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*, with an introduction by Marc Becker (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1998) and Che Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*, with an introduction and case studies by Brian Loveman and Thomas M. Davies, Jr. (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1985).
- 8 John Lee Anderson, *Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life* (New York: Grove Press, 1997).





EL COMANDO DE LA 8a. DIVISION DE EJERCITO

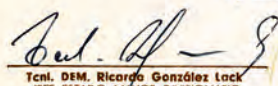
Confiere el presente

DIPLOMA DE HONOR

Al señor: Sgm. Daniel H. Chapa

por sus relevantes servicios prestados al Ejército Nacional en la Instrucción Especial de TROPAS DE ASALTO, llevadas a cabo en "La Esperanza".

Santa Cruz, 15 de diciembre de 1967.


Tcnl. DEM. Ricardo González Lack
JEFE ESTADO MAYOR DIVISIONARIO



Cnl. DEM. Joaquín Zenteno Anaya
COMANDANTE 8a. DIV. EJERCITO


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